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TONY THORNE, THE VAGABOND DETECTIVE; Or, RUNNING DOWN A ROGUE.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT, THE BANK RUNNER," "BOB ROCKETT, THE BOY DODGER," "WILL WILDFIRE," "DARK PAUL," ETC., ETC.



IT WAS THE FACE OF THE DROWNED BOY! A GASP OF WILD TERROR CAME FROM THE LIPS OF THE STARTLED RUFFIAN. HE SLOWLY RETREATED, HOLDING THE LAMP IN ONE HAND AND THE PAPERS IN THE OTHER.

Tony Thorne,

THE VAGABOND DETECTIVE;

OR,
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CHAPTER I.

A BIT OF FUN THAT DIDN'T WORK.

THERE was a group of boys on the sidewalk of a retired street, ragged young vagabonds in most part, who were laughing and jeering as if they had come into some splendid piece of fun. It was easy to see the source of their amusement. It consisted of two lads, who formed the center of the ring into which they had gathered.

One of these was a stout young vagrant, with a red head and narrow, foxy eyes, dressed in a ragged, greasy suit that looked as if it had done duty for two generations before him. The other boy was taller, but of slighter build. He was well and neatly dressed, and had a handsome, aristocratic face, that made him look utterly out of place in that jeering crew.

In fact, he seemed nervously anxious to go onward, from which he was hindered by the tormenting throng, who gathered around him like crows around a stray starling.

"Hold your hoses, little Pop goes the Weasel!" cried the boy who confronted him. "Got to guv an account o' yerself 'fore you kin pass these head-quarters. What did you do with the penny I guv you yesterday to buy candy?"

This gibe brought a roar of laughter from the group of vagrants.

The well-dressed boy looked keenly at his antagonist, as if taking his measure. He then remarked in cold, clear accents:

"You're a funny fellow, I suppose. I'd laugh myself, if I could only see where the laugh comes in. If you've got any more smart speeches to make just get them off quick, for I have no time to wait."

"What say, boys?" asked the other. "Shall we let him go without the password?"

"No—no!" came the general cry.

"You hear that, honey? You've got to show your shin. Can't let nobody pass 'cept he's got a skinned heel."

There was not a shadow of fear in the face of the slight youth as he confronted his burly antagonist.

"I tell you," he exclaimed, "I must go on. I am on an errand, and can't waste time here. Get out of my way! This is a public street."

"What will you do, sonny, if I don't ab-squatulate?"

"Nothing," was the answer. "Except to walk through you, or walk over you."

A roar of laughter followed.

"Lawsee! how the little cock does crow!" cried the young ruffian. "Maybe he's got fight in him. See here, greeny, here's my challenge."

He gave the tormented youth, who had grown suddenly pale, a fillip with his thumb on the nose.

It was a mistaken insult. The slight lad, stung to fury by the base affront, flung out his right fist so sharply into the face of the ruffian that the latter, taken by surprise, was knocked headlong to the ground!

A loud cry arose from the ring of ragamuffins, some of whom seemed ready to fall on the pale youth, who stood, heavily breathing, but undaunted, in their midst.

"Guv it to the white-faced baby!" cried one. "He tuk Jimmy foul. Swipe his jaws for him!"

They were crowding in, with threatening looks, when one of them, a short, stout chap, the raggedest of the lot, sprung between them and their victim.

"Git back!" he ejaculated. "Jimmy got served out right. If there's goin' to be a mill it's got to be a square one! If one of you touches this bumble-bee I'll bu'st his snout."

He looked as if he meant it, and the ring moved back before his threatening aspect.

"Ain't goin' to be no ten to one jobs, where I am," he declared. "If Jimmy Jones wants to stop boys on the street let him hoe his own tater-field."

By this time the prostrate Jimmy had scrambled to his feet again, and was approaching his antagonist with a furious face.

"Shoot yer ugly pictur', you tuk me foul!" he shouted. "I'm goin' to curry you down now, my laddie. Square yerself."

The youth who had been so basely assailed might have escaped during the momentary confusion of his antagonists, but he showed no desire to do so. Slight as he was he seemed grit to the backbone, and not one to back down before the biggest ruffian of the lot.

Yet it was very evident that he was outweighed by his foe. They had sparred less than a minute ere Jimmy got in a knock-down blow, that stretched the fair-faced youth in the dust.

Yet ere the shouts of the ruffian mob had ended he was up again, with blood on his face, but fire in his eyes.

Again they met, and again, after a short sparring the smaller boy went down.

"How do you like that, country?" crowed Jimmy. "Told you I was goin' to curry you. Got enough, hey, rooster?"

"No," answered the resolute lad, on his feet again in an instant. "And I won't have enough till I've paid you for your insult. You may knock me down, but it is not in your bones to whip me."

He was very pale. Blood was streaming down his cheek. But the indignation on his face, and the resolute fire in his eyes, showed that he was yet far from being conquered.

"Bully fer you!" cried the boy who had warned back the crowd. "Blame me if you ain't got pluck. Go in, little one! Go in, Jimmy! Pelt away, game-cocks! I'll see fair play!"

A third round, and down went the fair youth again. But this time he got in one or two sharp stingers on Jimmy's face, that brought red spots to that young man's countenance.

Up came the lad again, with undaunted courage. But he was becoming a sorry spectacle. Covered with dust from head to foot, his cap gone, his hair flying, his face disfigured with blood and dust, he had utterly lost his neat, spruce aspect. But he seemed one of the kind that have more fight in them the more they are whipped, and his eyes flashed fire as he again confronted his antagonist.

Quiet as the street was where this affray had taken place, several persons had now gathered about them. Among these was one gentlemanly person, well-dressed, and with a sharp, business-like face, who stopped and looked keenly at the combatants. A cry of surprise and indignation came from his lips.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed. "I would not have believed it! To think that you, Will Worth, whom I thought one of the quietest and most peaceful of boys, should get into a street fight with a young ruffian! I am utterly astonished! Come here at once, sir!"

The fair-faced boy looked around, with a start of nervous dread. But he answered firmly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Wilson. I did not start this. He struck me first. I am not going to be insulted by a hound like this if you discharge me from your service. I am going to whip the ruffian, sir, and I hope you'll let me fight it out."

Mr. Wilson hesitated for a moment, and then an odd expression came to his face.

"Go ahead then, you quarrelsome young rogue," he exclaimed. "You can have your fight out, and then I'll have it out with you afterward. It's your turn now. When you're done I'll take my turn."

There was a threatening tone in his voice that did not promise a favorable verdict to Will. But his blood was up now, and he was ready to sacrifice ten situations for revenge. He turned again to his antagonist, who had been listening eagerly to this conversation. One would have thought that he did not quite relish the job he had worked up, and would have liked to be relieved.

"Come on," cried Will, with bitter energy. "I am not whipped yet."

With a slight show of reluctance, Jimmy advanced. It is not always so pleasant to fight with those spring-steel chaps that won't stay whipped, and don't know when they have enough.

In a moment more the two antagonists were at it again, sharply sparring.

This time Will did not go down so quickly as before. He was alert and wary, and his strong antagonist found that he had work before him. Several keen blows were got in on his eyes and lips. Finally, with a fine rush, that broke down the defense of his antagonist, he got his fist in again between Will's eyes, and toppled him over to the ground.

The young savage rushed furiously forward,

and would have trampled with his heels on the face of the prostrate boy, but for the ragged youth who had offered to see fair play.

"None of that!" he cried, springing forward. "You're twice his weight now. This has got to be a square fight. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for a big blowhard to want to use your heels."

In a minute Will was on his feet again, and at his foe. He had received enough punishment to satisfy any ordinary boy, but he seemed to gather strength and spirit with each knockdown.

Instead of growing wilder as the fight went on he grew more cool and wary. He avoided the blows of his foe, and got in his own with quick decision. Jimmy, on the other hand, was growing furious at the unexpected staying-power of his antagonist. He rushed forward, striking heavily and wildly with both fists, and seeking to beat down Will's defenses. Suddenly a keen punisher fell on his temple that considerably amazed him. He staggered back a step, and then sat down on the cobble-stones of the street.

"Hurrah!" yelled the young vagrants, who were turning in favor of the brave young gentlemen, who did not know when he was whipped. "That's one in on Jimmy."

The prostrate boy rose, and rushed with the fury of a mad bull at his smaller foe. But Will had all his senses about him. A quick step aside, a sharp blow under the ear, and an alert trip, and down went the ragamuffin face forward to the ground.

The shouts grew louder. Jimmy rose more slowly, and did not seem quite so ready to come up to the scratch.

"Have you got enough?" asked Will disdainfully. "Are you ready to acknowledge that you are a coward and bully, that picks out little boys to practice on?"

"No, blast you!" roared the young gamin, springing hotly forward.

He was no match now for Will. Though the face of the latter was covered with blood and dirt, and his eyes half-closed, his heart was stouter than ever, and his coolness greater.

He parried the heavy blows that were dealt at him, and dropped his right fist between Jimmy's eyes, a square knock-down blow.

The discomfited young fighter showed no signs of getting up again. He lay still, as if stunned by the shock.

"I fancy he has got enough of the little chap he was going to curry down," sneered Will. "Is there any more of you want to try it on? I am in the humor now."

The boys shrank back, as if they did not like Will's style of fighting.

But the young gutter-snipe that had declared for fair play stepped forward.

"I wouldn't mind fighting you," he said, "but 'taint fair to pile on too much. Guess you've done your share. And you're a young hoss, clear through. I'll lick the boy as says you ain't. I like you, bully!"

"Thank you," said Will, turning away disdainfully. "If nobody else wants to stop me, I guess I'll go on."

"When you get all that dirt off your face, come up to the store. I want a little talk with you," said Mr. Wilson coldly.

Will looked quickly up, but said nothing. He turned away with lowered head. The fever of the fight was over, and he began to think seriously of the consequences.

Mr. Wilson paused to speak for a moment to Will's ragged backer, and then walked off in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERY IN THE WIND.

It was the next morning after the fight. In the private office of a large mercantile establishment in the lower part of the city sat two men, busily engaged in conversation. One of these was Mr. Wilson, the gentleman who had caught Will in his fight the day before. The other was Mr. Brown, his partner in the firm of "Wilson & Brown, Linen Merchants."

"I see no other way left," said Mr. Wilson decidedly. "The fact is, old Dirk is as sharp as a razor, and our last move was a mistake. We have put him on his guard, and it will not be easy to fool the old coon."

"We might try Clarence. He has never seen him," suggested Mr. Brown. "But I fear he is not shrewd enough."

Mr. Wilson shook his head decidedly.

"Well, then, why not send a detective? We can certainly find one too sharp for an old Jersey coaster, like Dirk Dorgan."

"You don't know the rogue like I do, or you might change your mind," returned Mr. Wilson. "Let any stranger try to scrape acquaintance with the old fellow, and he will be on his guard at once. He is as suspicious as a rat, and he knows very well that there is something in the wind. We must throw him off his guard, and I see only one way."

"I don't know," said Mr. Brown doubtfully. "The savage old pirate would choke a spy with as little conscience as he would a cat. I am not willing to expose the boy to such danger."

"Oh! he is sharp enough. And he is as brave as a young lion. There is no give-up in him. I had proof of that yesterday; and this idea flashed at once into my head."

"Hush! Here he comes."

The door of the office was opened the next instant, and Will Worth walked into the room. He was clean and sprucely dressed as usual. All traces of the fray had been brushed from his clothes, and washed, as far as possible, from his face, but the latter bore unmistakable marks of a hard battle. One eye was swollen and discolored, his upper lip was puffed out, and several strips of sticking-plaster covered various cuts on his face. Altogether Will's handsome countenance had lost much of its beauty in the fight.

And he seemed dreadfully downcast. He hung his head with a look of shame, as he stood before his employers, in whose faces he saw only cold displeasure. They sat looking at him in silence for a moment, while poor Will seemed ready to sink through the floor.

"Well, sir, I hope you feel better this morning," remarked Mr. Wilson, in tones that seemed to Will coldly scornful. "You had your fun yesterday. It is, as I told you then, our turn to-day."

"Yes, sir," answered Will, sadly but firmly. "I am sorry, Mr. Wilson, but if I had it to do over again I am afraid I would have to whip that boy again. I can't stand having it rubbed in like he did. Of course, I know I have disgraced myself."

"Oh, you do? You acknowledge that? That's clever of you. You would make a good champion, Will; but that's not what we hired you for."

"I know that," replied Will, lifting his head with a proud fling, and throwing off his shame-faced look. "I am very sorry, Mr. Wilson. But there are some things that can't be helped. I think you will find everything right. I did every errand yesterday but that one to Croll & Dawson, and I sent one of my friends to do that. That's all. You'll find my book correct. There's a week's wages due me, but I don't care for that. Here's my key."

He laid a key on the table before them, and turned with a steady step toward the door. The merchants cast at each other a look of surprise.

"Hold, there!" cried Mr. Brown, hastily. "What do you mean? Where are you going?"

"I don't know. I am too old to sell newspapers, and I don't suppose I can get another situation. You have been very good to me, but I cannot ask you for a recommendation after my behavior. But I guess I'll get something to do. Good-by, sirs!"

Will's hand was on the handle of the door as he spoke. Before he could open it, Mr. Wilson sprung from his chair and laid his hand firmly against the door.

"See here, little touch-and-go," he exclaimed, "just suppose you give us a chance to get a word in edgeways before you go off like a shot from a shovel. I fancy nobody has discharged you yet. I certainly have not. Have you, Mr. Brown?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you hear that? We haven't discharged you; so you must be discharging us. What have we done that you are not satisfied with?"

The poor boy looked from one to the other with questioning eyes, into which a new hope began to rise.

"But," he stammered. "But—I know you have been very kind to me. But you said I had my turn yesterday, and you would have yours to-day. I know what that means. I didn't want to give you the trouble to discharge me."

"Why, you're proud little monkey, so you won't be whipped, and you won't be discharged! You are bound to take the whip in your own hands, are you? See here, Will; you've had your say. Now, listen to me awhile. To begin with, take this key again."

Will, with a quick flash of hope in his eyes, obeyed this order.

"Now go back to your work. As long as you continue to do as well as you have always

done you needn't be afraid of losing your position. From this week your salary will be increased one dollar per week."

Will looked with astounded eyes from one face to the other of his employers. They smiled at his astonishment.

"But, sir," he faltered. "I cannot take it. I have done nothing to deserve it. I hope you will insist on nothing of the kind, for I cannot take it."

"Yes, you can, and you shall. You are a brave little fellow, and that is worth something. If you had let that boy whip you yesterday I would have cut down your wages a dollar a week. As you had the pluck to go on and whip the young bully I am going to give you the extra dollar. I like pluck, my boy. Now go to your work."

Will continued to look at his employers with staring eyes, as if he could not quite believe in this unexpected turn of fortune. Finally he let fall his cap and key, and sprung eagerly forward, grasping Mr. Wilson's hand.

"Oh, sir, he gratefully exclaimed, "I will never forget your kindness. And yours too, Mr. Brown. You are both far kinder to me than I deserve. I expect I would have gone to ruin if you had thrown me on the street, for you know I have no home. But only give me a chance and I will make myself a man. I know I have the stuff in me, if I only get the chance."

"That you shall have," answered his employers in a breath. "Go on as you have done, and never take an in-ult from a street vagabond."

"I don't like fighting," answered Will. "And I won't fight if I can get out of it. But if any of that gang insult me again I'm going to make them smart. All but the one fellow who took my part. I like him. He's honorable and square up, if he is ragged and dirty. But can't I have two or three days to get my face well? I'm ashamed to go out on the street with such a face as this."

"Certainly, Will. You can have the rest of the week. But you will not have to go on the street again soon. We have some other work cut out for you which will need all your intelligence and courage. If you do it successfully it will make a man of you at once. If you fail you will be no worse off than at present."

"New work for me?" cried Will, in surprise. "What is it, sir?"

"Never mind now. You will soon learn. But it will take you away from the city and into new and rough scenes for a period. You will need all your wits and all your bravery. There, that will do for the present. Go home now, and try to get your face into shape. Come here to-morrow at this hour, and we will let you know what you are to do."

Will walked from the office in a very different frame of mind from that with which he had entered it. He was then disconsolate enough to jump overboard and put an end to his troubles. He was now so full of joy that he was not quite sure whether he was standing on his head or his heels. This new and mysterious enterprise for which he had been chosen. What was it? What was he to do? A dozen conjectures ran through his mind, all of which were dismissed as improbable. He was so preoccupied that he heeded not the jests and questions of the salesmen, who had noticed his disfigured face.

"Look a-here, young gentleman. Can't you post me 'bout where I'll find Wilson & Brown's store? I've been huntin' it all 'round here.—Hello! Shoot me, if 'tain't the little chap wot licked Jimmy Jones!"

Will had turned at the first words of this address, and now recognized the ragged boy who had seen fair play in the fight. His face lit up at the recognition.

"It is you, is it?" he exclaimed. "I am glad to see you again. You're a square boy if you do have a ragged coat, and if I ever catch anybody crowding over you, just count me in. My name is Will Worth—what's yours?"

"Tony Thorne. The boys call me Thorny Tony."

"Not a bad name," answered Will. "You'd do prime, if you had a clean face and decent clothes. This is Wilson & Brown's store. What do you want?"

"I don't know. It's them wants me. That gentleman what guv you Jesse for fightin' yesterday axed me to stop here to-day. Dunno what he wants, but I'm allers in fur snucks."

A look of surprise came upon Will's face. What did this mean? Was it anything connected with himself? He looked into the shrewd, freckled face of the boy before him with an idea of asking him some further questions, but he checked this intention, and pointed to the door from which he had just emerged.

"This is the store. You will find Mr. Wilson in the office now."

Will turned away deeply perplexed, while Tony entered the store with an independent step.

The merchants were still in their private office engaged in conversation, when the door was opened without the ceremony of knocking, and Tony Thorne walked with an easy air into the room.

"You axed me to come," he said apologetically to Mr. Wilson, as he coolly seated himself. "Here I am."

The merchants checked their conversation, and looked in surprise at their unsavory visitor.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Wilson; "I know you now. You are the boy I spoke to at the fight, yesterday."

"Jist so. Dunno what you want with me, but my time ain't much took up, so I thought I'd toddle up this way."

"You go in for fair play in a fight, I see," remarked Mr. Wilson, looking at him curiously.

"You bet I do! I'd licked that whole crowd 'fore I'd let 'em heap on that plucky little feller. That's my style."

The merchant sat looking at him for some moments, as if measuring his caliber. But this failed to discompose Tony, who sat as easy as an old shoe. Time was of no consequence to him.

"Answer me now," began Mr. Wilson. "How do you make a living?"

"Sometimes one way, and sometimes another," answered the ragamuffin. "And sometimes I don't make it no way. Then I sponge on my daddy. When I make a stake he sponges on me; so we're square."

"You are a sharp and active-looking fellow. Would not you like a good paying job?"

"That depends. I manage to scrub through. Tain't every job I'd take up."

"This you will find a profitable one. It will take you from the city, and will call for the use of all your wits. There is no hard work about it, but it will be more of a holiday than a task. You may, however, have some adventure, and possibly may go through some danger. But you look as if you would not be afraid."

"Don't calk'late I will," answered Tony easily. "Tell you what, that's just the kind of a job I'm cut out for, if it's honest, and this is the fust time it ever turned up. I'll jist snatch on to it like a monkey would snatch a peanut. Peg it out. I'm on hand."

During the next hour the merchants continued closeted with their ragged visitor, much to the surprise of their clerks, who had taken Tony for an impudent beggar.

CHAPTER III.

A RUN ACROSS THE JERSIES.

A WEEK has passed since the date of the conference of the two boys with Messrs. Wilson & Brown. It has been anything but an idle week with them, for they have been kept busy with preparations for their mysterious enterprise, and with directions how they are to act.

"You understand now" said Mr. Wilson, as a farewell warning. "Of course we can only lay out for you a general plan. You must use your own wits for the remainder. Nobody can tell beforehand what circumstances may arise; and you will need to be wide-awake for everything. Keep to your general plan whatever may happen."

"Why don't you arrest this man, and make him tell before the court?" queried Will.

"There is an old proverb, my boy, that you can bring a horse up to the rack but you can't make him eat," answered Mr. Wilson, with a laugh. "It is that way with Dirk Dorgan. If he don't choose to speak he won't speak for all the courts in the land. If we want the truth we must cheat it out of him. Nobody can squeeze it out of him."

"Jist you bet we're the larks as 'll do that," returned Tony Thorne, with a look of assurance. "We're a-goin' to be saddled by no old water-dog."

"Don't be too confident," warned the merchant. "If you make a false move he will see through you as easy as you would see through a pane of glass. And now good-by, and good-luck. Here is the train."

They were soon rolling over the broad level of New Jersey in a fast-flying train, through desolate reaches of pine forest, and over broad stretches of barren sands, toward the distant coast, and the far-off tumbling ocean.

As they proceed on their journey we must give a little closer attention to the two boys, for

they are considerably changed since we last made their acquaintance.

Will Worth has changed his quiet business suit, for a tasty, fashionable rig, that gives him something of the aspect of a young dandy. He wears a rather loud cravat, with a diamond pin, and a diamond ring flashes on his finger. He also sports a watch, with a showy chain, and altogether seems a young gentleman of wealth and leisure.

Thorny Tony is equally transformed. His face is as clean as if it had been scrubbed with a rolling-pin, and his rags have been replaced with a neat, well-made suit, of plain, but serviceable material. He sports no jewelry like Will, and there has been no effort to make a gentleman of him. That would have been impossible. He looks rather like a poor boy, who has been cared for by careful parents.

"My, wouldn't the fellows stare if they seen me now!" laughed Tony, as he looked at himself with great satisfaction.

Will could but enjoy the new pride of his companion.

"You don't know what a spry-looking fellow you are," he remarked, with a look of admiration. "Your new clothes have made another boy of you. I think we are both changed."

"You bet!" answered Tony. "You're an out-and-out sport; a reg'lar little dude. My eyes, won't you play hob with the gals! You've got to guv up fightin'. Nobby young gentlemen, like you, don't fight."

"I hope they will leave me alone then. I don't want to fight. But what if they come crowding on me?"

"Oh! you leave that to me. I'll scrub 'em. There's nothin' I like better nor a good rough-and-tumble."

"That will never do," answered Will decidedly. "We are not to know one another, remember that. And if we come together there's got to be bad blood between us. Those are the orders, you know."

Tony looked at him in momentary surprise, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"That's so! I forgot," he acknowledged. "It's a rum go, anyhow. Don't you speak cross to me down yonder, for I don't take in no stuck-up dudes. Jist as leave pickle your pretty face as look at you."

Will echoed Tony's laugh.

"If you try it on I'll serve you out as I did Jimmy Jones," he answered. "I am bound to stand up for the rights of the aristocracy."

On and on rolled the train, through fields and woods, and past wide, slimy swamps, that seemed to be the haunts of fevers. Here and there appeared a village, and some well-cultivated farms; but the most of the journey was through a cedar wilderness.

Miles and miles of such a country were left behind them. They continued to talk at intervals; and at other intervals contented themselves with gazing out of the car windows. The warm breath of summer was in the air, and everything was clothed in its greenest verdure, so far as the sandy soil permitted. At length the young travelers broke into another line of conversation, which we must repeat, since it is of some interest to our readers.

"You ought to see my dad!" exclaimed Tony. "Tell you what, he's a hoss. He's terrible big, and strong as a buffalo. Why, he used to hold me straight out with one hand, and spank me with t'other. My, couldn't he slap!"

"Don't he work?" asked Will, thinking of Tony's disreputable appearance.

"Yes; when he can't git no whisky. He's too fond of his bitters, that's the trouble."

"I hope you don't touch it?"

"Not much!" and Tony set his lips firmly. "Seen too much of it. Nobody but a fool meddles with a dog arter he's seen how it kin bite. I ain't that sort of a fool, nary time. What kind of a dad have you got? I bet he couldn't lick mine."

"I have none," answered Will sadly. "I have neither father nor mother; never had."

"Never had? Whew! That's a lark!"

"Never to know, I mean. They were both dead before I knew anything. I don't know any more about them than for their names, they were poor people, and I was knocked about when I was young."

"Is that so?" asked Tony, with great interest. "I've been knocked about, too, though not the same way. Tell me all about it; dunno but it'd been better for me, for I ain't had no scroughin' sort of a good time."

"The first I remember," answered Will thoughtfully, "I was living with an old woman away down town. Old Mother Luke, the folks used to call her. I was a tiny little tot then—

not much bigger than a horse-chestnut. But she made me go out and beg for cold scraps with a basket. When I got bigger I had to learn to play the fiddle, and go out and play for pennies."

"That must ha' been nice! Can you play yet?"

"Oh yes—a little. But it wasn't so very nice, for the old woman used to beat me dreadfully if I didn't bring enough in."

"She did?" exclaimed Tony, his eyes snapping. "And she wasn't your mother, neither? I'd never stood that, nohow. I'd run away."

"So did I," answered Will. "She threw up to me one day that I was only a stray, and that my parents were not what they ought to be. That stirred up my blood, and when I went out that day I didn't come back again."

"Bully for you! But what did you do?"

"All sorts of things. I slept anywhere that I could get a chance to snuggle, and I eat anything, and did all kinds of jobs. Sometimes, when I got very bad off, I played the fiddle, and that always paid, for they called me a good player."

"Why didn't you stick to it, then?"

"Because I was afraid of Mother Luke, who was always looking for me. She saw me sometimes, too, and I had to run like a killdeer."

"But you could have gone into the country, or to some other town?"

"I had another reason for not playing," rejoined Will. "It was too much like begging, and I didn't want to grow up a beggar. I always wanted to be respectable, and to do honest work."

Tony looked at his companion with some admiration.

"That didn't trouble this chicken," he remarked. "I allers dug in for a good time. Had it, too, you bet! Kind of liked ragged clothes, for I didn't git licked fur tearin' them. And I got so used to bein' pounded by the boys that I didn't mind dad's lickin's one bit. I tell you, I've had it jolly."

Will shook his head doubtfully.

"There's two kinds of lives, Tony; one for sport, and one for duty. The last is my kind, and I think it pays best in the long run. But I may as well finish. I grew up, as I said, in all sorts of ways. I tried everything, holding horses, blacking shoes, and selling papers. I've had peanut stands and apple baskets. Then I carried for a market-man for a good while. He took me in his family, after a while, and I'm living with him now."

"Good for him! What's his name?"

"Adam Sparks. He has a buckster stand in Spring Garden Market. He was ever so good to me, he and his wife. I had to work hard, but they sent me to night-school, and gave me an education."

"And got you in Wilson & Brown's store?"

"Oh, no! I got that position myself. I thought it was time I was learning something better than carrying a market-basket. So I looked around for a place, and got one. I've been there now for near three years."

"Do you like it?"

"I guess I do! They are ever so kind. And I don't mind the work one bit."

"It's queer," answered Tony, thoughtfully. "I don't think I'd like it. I want room round me, and don't like nobody to tell me what I'm to do. Guess I'm born for a street rat. Somehow a situation is like a cage that they fasten a bird in. Calk'late I'm a wild bird. Mayn't git fed as nice, but I've got more room to stretch my wings."

Will shook his head with a knowing smile.

"It won't do, Tony. Everybody in this world is in a cage, and can't get out of it. Some may fly a little further than others, but they are sure to hit against the bars before they go far. Better have a little cage, well furnished, than a big empty one."

"Maybe so," answered Tony, with a meaning shrug. "Guess my dad's one of the bars of my cage, and I plug up ag'in' him pretty often. Anyhow these good clothes don't feel quite right. I ain't half as independent in 'em as in my old rags. But let's drop all that. How 'bout Mother Luke? Seen her since?"

"Yes. I don't care for her now. And I don't believe she knows me. She has got to be a very old woman that goes dragging along the streets till I can't help being sorry for her."

"There's no use bein' sorry fur that kind," declared Tony. "You can't help them. They're past help. They'd only be miserable if you put 'em in a palace. Let 'em alone and they're happy. I know it, 'cause I've been as happy as a king with a ragged coat and a crust picked out o' the gutter; and I'm half miserable now in this decent rig, and a pocket full of cash."

Will looked at his odd companion as one might look at some new species of animal. He hardly knew what to make of him.

"What's that queer smell in the air?" he at length asked. "It smells just like a heap of oysters."

"It's the salty ocean," answered Tony, with a look of superior wisdom. "This ain't the first time I've been down here to smell the salt seas. Look out here. Do you see that blue line away off yonder, where the sky comes down?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the Atlantic ocean. That's the big duck-pond that stretches out forever and ever, thousands and thousands of miles, with the sharks and the whales swimming underneath, and men steaming and sailing overhead. Lawsee! you bet I don't peg out afore I git over it, to see t'other side."

Will was silent, with his eyes fixed with strange sensations on the distant liquid line. That was the ocean—the mighty, the grand! His heart swelled with new emotions as he looked upon it, and the great earth seemed to grow tenfold greater at this first vision of the sublime seas.

"These are the salt marshes which we're runnin' over now," explained Tony. "And yonder's the town where we're to land. Guess we'd best split jist here. We're strangers from this on. Don't forget that."

"Very true," answered Will. "Our work begins now. We must let nothing stand between."

"I'm goin' to take that empty seat. Don't you look cross-ways at me, for I'm down on 'ristocrats."

Will laughed as Tony moved away from him to another part of the car.

Five minutes after, the train rolled into the station at the seaside village of Micmac, and came slowly to a dead halt.

CHAPTER IV.

A BOY'S BOLD CHALLENGE.

THE Seaside House was the principal hotel of Micmac. The little town had long vegetated as a fishing village, but since the annual run of summer visitors to the sea-shore it had got its grand hotel, and its rows of boarding cottages, for the accommodation of the pleasure-seekers from the cities.

These stood in the new town, on the south side of the narrow river, that there made its way to the sea. On the north side was the old town, a series of rattle-down frame shanties, which looked across in sturdy independence at the spruce, new habitations beyond the stream.

The two boys had separated on reaching the town. Will had taken a room at the hotel, where he played the part of a young gentleman of wealth and leisure. It was late in the season, and most of the guests had departed, but some yet remained, taking advantage of the pleasant September weather.

Thorny Tony on the contrary, had gone to live with his uncle in the old town, beyond the stream. It is true that this uncle was manufactured for the occasion, out of a shrewd old fisherman, who would have accepted fifty nephews, on the persuasion of Mr. Wilson's cash. Just why the boy was saddled on him he did not know, and did not take the trouble to ask. He was well paid for taking him in, and keeping his secret, and that was enough for old Jake Dumps. If he had been asked to call Old Nick his grandfather, or Beezebub his grandson, on the same terms, he would not have hesitated for an instant, and would have explained the relationship to everybody's satisfaction.

Tony had taken the role of a poor boy, that had to work for his living, and he at once began to assist old Jake in his summer business of taking out fishing parties of visitors. The harum-scarum boy was delighted with this vocation, and took hold of it in a way that charmed the old waterman.

"Blame my eyes," he growled to one of his associates, "if the boy ain't got a peck o' brains in his headpan. It's my poor sister Lizy's son, Joe, as pegged out last June. The lad's city born, but he's got grit. Thought I'd have my hands full; but, Lord! he'll be a help, instead of a bother."

Will, on the other hand, assumed a very different role. He was down for sport, not for work, and put on a multitude of airs as he lounged about, switching his tasty cane, with its ivory dog's-head, and making rapid acquaintance with the young gentlemen and ladies of the place. He had provided himself with a pair of eye-glasses, which he wore in a dandified

fashion that completed his air of a dude. Folks looked at him with secret smiles, as they saw the young swell proudly strutting around.

"What an untrimmed little peacock," muttered one old merchant, with a sneering laugh. "If a boy of mine was to put on such airs, hang me if I wouldn't dust his coat for him till I cured him of all such tomfoolery. Ought to be put in a glass cage, and shown around at ten cents a head. That's about all he's fit for."

But such ill-natured remarks little troubled Master Will, who played his part to admiration. He seemed to have plenty of money, and abundance of clothes, and on a fine afternoon, several days after his arrival, found himself in the old town, dressed in a tasty suit of blue flannel, in readiness for a fishing excursion.

"I hope there's no danger of getting sea-sick," he said, playing carelessly with his cane. "I am not used to the salt water, you know."

"It's as quiet as a baby on the inlet," answered the fisherman addressed. "And I've got the stanchest boat on the island. Don't you have a ghost of a fear. What's more, I allers take a chunk of salt pork along, to cure them as is squeamish."

"Salt pork! Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Will. "I never could abide salt pork."

"Guv the babby some molasses taffy," growled another man who was standing alongside, in a voice like the grumble of a nor'wester. "And swipe him down with a hunk of oakum. Blow me for a pirate, if I wouldn't like to make a spread-eagle of the little chinny doll!"

He walked away with a look of utter disgust. Will gazed at him. He was a short, squat figure, with a great width of shoulder, and was dressed in a suit of dreadnaught, well covered with oil and fish-scales.

His face was harsh and rugged, with something of reckless ferocity in its expression. But the small, twinkling eyes told a different story; they expressed sharpness and cunning. He seemed to be about fifty years of age, and was as weather-beaten as if he had been exposed to the sea-weather for his whole life.

"Who is this complimentary gentleman?" asked Will, in a tone loud enough to reach the ears of the rude waterman. "I am not aware that I asked him any questions."

"Hush!" warned the fisherman, in a cautious tone. "That's Dirk Dorgan. You'd best keep clear of him, my young sprout. Just shut your ears when Dirk's about, if you want to keep out of trouble."

"Dirk Dorgan," answered Will, in a loud, defiant tone, but with a secret sense of satisfaction. "He can call himself Dick Devilsmouth, for all it troubles me, and save his breath to cool his porridge. When I want his slack, I'll ask for it."

This defiant speech reached the ears for which it was intended. Dirk turned quickly back, with a flashing eye and lowering countenance.

"Do you know who you are talkin' to, Hop-o'-my-thumb?" he asked, in a tone of suppressed thunder. "You young jackanapes, do you think to come down here and lord it over old salts that's weathered more gales than you've got dollars? Shoot yer puny picture, if you come buzzin' round me I'll take you up between my finger and thumb, and make you sing wuss than a swamp musketeer."

The fishermen, who knew Dirk's furious temper, drew back a step at this explosion. The angry giant lowered over Will, as if he would crush him with his weight. Yet the boy, as we know, had plenty of courage, and was not the one to cower before a blustering bully. He stood erect, without yielding a step, and looked with a steady eye into Dirk's gloomy face, while he switched his cane as carelessly as if he had been engaged in a pleasant conversation.

"How do you sell ground around here, by the square foot?" asked Will, with provoking ease. "I should judge, by the way you lord it, that you own the whole country. Every cock can crow on his own dunhill, they say, and I'd like to buy enough from you to make me a dunhill to crow on."

This bold defiance seemed to doubly infuriate the angry waterman. He closed his brawny fist, that looked big enough to annihilate Will with a blow, while his bushy brows contracted with rage.

"So!" he roared, with the growl of a hurricane, "you're tryin' to gibe me, are you? I'm afraid to hit you, for fear I'd smash you like I would a fly. But, shiver my timbers, if I don't duck some of the sauce out of you."

He extended his hand and grasped Will's collar with a firm grip. The boy made no effort to escape, and not a shade of dread passed

over his countenance as he continued to face his burly opponent.

"All right," answered Will. "You are the strongest. Go ahead; I won't resist. It's your turn now, so make the most of it. After you are done, we'll have this little talk out in another fashion."

"What do you mean?" cried Dirk, loosing his hold in astonishment at the boy's undivining boldness. "Is the little city canary-bird trying to threaten me? Blast me, if that ain't a joke!" He laughed with a sound like the sawing of timber. "Come, you want to go out a-fishing. Step into my boat; I'll give you a lesson in the bizness."

"I'm your man," answered Will promptly. "Fetch out your boat."

"You'll go with me?" queried Dirk, in surprise.

"You bet I will! I'm only a boy, but when I say a thing, there's no back-down in me."

Dirk looked him over from head to foot with a curious gaze. He then turned away with a low whistle of surprise.

"Stick to it, my game-cock," he growled. "You've guv yer word, and go you shall."

"Go I will, if you're not afraid to take me," answered the boy, with a tantalizing assurance.

Dirk seemed on the point of returning some angry retort. But a change passed over his face, and he turned and walked away without a word.

The fishermen around, who had kept silent, though with uneasy looks, during this conversation, now hastened to warn Will of the danger he was running.

"Don't think of going with him," warned one. "He's up to some trickery. I know that look of his. You'd best take a set over the river before he comes back."

"Jump into my boat!" cried another. "Dirk's a reckless rogue, and means you harm. Jump in, and I'll row you over."

"Not much!" answered Will decidedly. "If he's ready to take me, I'm ready to go. I never backed down from fear yet, and I don't think I'll begin now."

"But you don't know this man, you foolish little chap. He's a terror, I tell you, and I haven't seen him in such a rage for a year. Dirk's an old wrecker and pirate, they say. He's equal to flinging you overboard and towing you ashore at the stern of his boat."

"I'll take the chances," answered Will, switching his leg easily with his flexible cane. "I'm only a boy, and ain't expected to know much. But I've always heard that the way to tame a tiger is to keep your eye on it, and show no weak blood. I'm going to play that game with this tiger, and I wager that I bring him back tame."

The grizzled men looked with surprise on this bold boy, and shook their heads doubtfully. His courage seemed to them the foolish recklessness of youth, yet they could not help admiring it. A man of ripe judgment and discretion would scarcely have taken such an unnecessary risk, but there is no limit to the daring of a boy.

While they continued to converse Dirk's boat came around a bend of the river, moving onward rapidly under his long, sinewy strokes. The water curled in foam before it as it came dashing on.

"Once more," said the first spokesman. "You had better take warning."

"I am going with him," answered Will decidedly. "I intend to let him see I am not afraid of him. He doesn't expect to see me here when he returns, but he will see me."

Evidently Will was right, for there was a look of surprise in Dirk's eyes as he beheld the boy waiting for him on the river-bank, in the same easy, graceful attitude.

At this moment two other persons walked up to the group. One of these was a wrinkled, grizzled old waterman, who looked as if the storms of seventy winters had blown upon his countenance. The other was a boy of about Will's age, a short, stout, open-faced youth, dressed in the rough habiliments of a fisherman.

It was Jake Dumps and his new nephew, transformed already into a son of the sea in appearance. The two boys looked at each other, without a sign of recognition in their eyes. Tony cast a disdainful glance over Will's tasty flannel suit, and then looked down with satisfaction at his own rough but serviceable dress.

"Lawsee, what a swell!" he muttered, in the hearing of the fisherman.

"You're a well-built sort of a chap," remarked Will carelessly. "Do you go out boating?"

"You bet. Boatin', gunnin', fishin', anything you want."

"Very good. I'll hire you some day for a round. Just now I've hired this old salt."

He pointed to Dirk, who had walked up, after landing his boat.

"Hired me, boy?" he harshly asked.

"Yes. I expect to pay for my sport. Are you ready?"

"All ready. Step in. If you don't like the sport, you needn't pay for it."

"I won't," answered Will, as he sprung into the boat.

Dirk followed him, with a queer look on his bronzed features. A few strokes of the oars, and the boat darted out into the river and headed for the sea.

The fishermen on the shore continued looking and gravely conversing, in great doubt if they had been wise to permit the reckless boy to go out with the hardened old ruffian.

After a few minutes the group broke up, Tony and his new-found uncle taking boat, and rowing out into the stream.

CHAPTER V.

WILL PUTS HIS HEAD IN THE LION'S MOUTH.

THE two boats moved down the river at no great distance apart, that containing Thorny Tony and his ready-made uncle in the rear of that which held Will and Dirk.

The latter looked back with a scowling glance at the following boat, as if with the idea that it was in pursuit of him. With his fierce temper and giant strength few boatmen of the vicinity would have ventured to play the spy on his movements. His lip curled as he recognized Jake Dumps.

"No fear o' him," he muttered. "The sly old rat is got sense enough to tend to his own biz'ness. He knows which side his bread's buttered."

Under his strong strokes the boat shot rapidly forward, soon leaving the river and darting out into the open sea. Here a fresh wind met them, that seemed strengthening every minute. The surf broke heavily over the bar that lay off the river's mouth, and filled the air with that monotonous voice of the ocean, that never ceases to moan and roar.

They turned up the coast, through the quiet water inside the bar, where the wild roll outside was turned into an uneasy heave.

"You kin get seasick now, if you hanker arter it," growled Dirk, as the boat tossed unpleasantly. "Only I ain't got no salt-pork like old Toby promised you."

"I reckon I won't try it on then," Will pleasantly answered from his seat at the tiller. "I've no notion of spoiling my sport by any such nonsense."

As they rowed on Jake Dumps fell further behind, as if he had no thought of pursuit. In half an hour he vanished from sight in the windings of the inlet channel which they had entered. A long island here cut off the breakers, and left a broad stream of quiet water between it and the mainland, the favorite fishing-grounds of the settlement.

Jake's boat rowed slowly on into the mouth of the inlet. The old fisherman shook his grizzled head, as he twisted around on his seat to gaze forward.

"I don't like this biz'ness none too well," he dubiously remarked. "The boy is a risky little jackdaw to trust hisself with Dirk arter flingin' sass in that rough chap's face. Dirk don't keer a fig for the law when he's mad; and he's got the devil inside his skin as big as a barn-door."

"I guess he won't eat nobody alive without salt," returned Tony. "The little swell ain't no slouch, you kin see that in his eyes. Who is this terror, as is got all the folks hereaways on their knees afore him? Hope he don't take no bite at me. I bet you, if he does, that I'll lay crossways in his throat. Jist peg out all about him."

"Tain't much anybody knows," answered the old man, as he continued to ply his oars. "He's been livin' on this coast nigh on to twenty year, and he ain't made a friend in all that time. And 'bout his biz'ness, there ain't an oyster keeps his shells shet tighter."

"But you know something 'bout him," persisted Tony. "He talks a good deal. Why, I've had some chats with him myself. Nobody can't talk fur twenty year without lettin' somethin' out."

"Precious little. His old life is bagged up and laid away somewhere out of sight. Howsoever, there's some p'ints as folks think they know. Some on 'um says as Dirk was a reg'lar pirate in his young days. But, that is all blather. Nobody knows naught 'bout

it. There's others says as he was a wrecker, and has lured more nor one ship ashore with false lights. So far's I'm consarned, I never says what I don't know."

"A wrecker?" repeated Tony, thoughtfully. "Is that since he came on this coast?"

"Why he's blamed for the barque, Emira, as come ashore on the island sands 'bout seventeen years ago. I won't say what's in it, 'cause I don't know. There was only one man come ashore alive, and he told a queer story 'bout false lights. There was suspicion 'bout Dirk, but nobody couldn't nail it on him."

"Only one man?" echoed Tony.

"And a baby. He brought a baby ashore, alive. But it disappeared while he was in a swoon. Where it went to the Lord knows. Only Dirk himself was out o' sight fur two weeks arter."

"Ah!" exclaimed Tony, greatly interested. "And hasn't nothin' turned up 'bout that there baby since?"

"Not a hair. There's a suspicion allers hung to Dirk. He's had strange visitors occasional, and gone away on long journeys. And one night, when he'd took too much, I heered him myself, swearin' fearful 'bout some man as he was bein' revenged on. But he's a dark and a furious chap, and I wouldn't like to be the one to say baby to him."

He rowed on silently for several minutes, seemingly lost in deep reflection. He then continued his remarks, as if communing with himself.

"There's been folks down here a many a time since then, pokin' round 'bout that baby. And more nor one's tried to play sharp on Dirk. But 'twern't never no use. You mought as well try to squeeze honey outer an oak tree as make him sell his secrets. Tain't three months since a gentleman from the city was down, as had a fearful quarrel with Dirk. I know it, fur I happened to catch a few words. The ruffian huffed him, and told him to his face that he had the squeeze on him, and was goin' to keep it. He's an awful man, I tell you, and I hope that little ninny won't git inter trouble by stirrin' him up. I'd jist as soon wake up a hornets' nest with a pine switch. Guess we'd best fling in our lines here fur a try, Tony. Ther's promise o' fish."

"Best row on to where we nipped 'em so n' at yesterday," answered Tony. "I've a whim they'll bite spryer ther."

"Ther' it is ag'in. The boys is wiser than their granddaddies. All right. I'll let you see who knows best, the old rooster or the young 'un."

He rowed on, with a grim smile of sarcasm. But we must leave them and return to the other boat, which had continued its course until it was a mile or two ahead. Many fishermen had been passed, all of them returning, and one of them had called out to Dirk.

"Best not stay too late. Taere's an ugly cloud rising in the eastern cffing. There'll be a fresh gale by night, and the surf's rolling heavy. You may fiid trouble in making the river."

"Thank ye for nothin'," growled Dirk. "Of course I'm a greenhorn, and dunno what I'm about. But I ain't never been the man yet to up and run from a capful of wind."

The other rowed on, a little angry at the ungracious reception of his well-meant warning.

Shortly after they reached the desired fishing-grounds, and got in their lines. The fish seemed plentiful and bit readily, and it was not long ere they began to show some results of their sport in the scaly prey that lined the bottom of the boat.

"This is fine sport," said Will gayly, as he took a large fish from his hook and rebaited it. "I never saw better fishing."

He might have safely said that he had never seen any fishing at all.

"Fine fun, is it?" queried Dirk. "It's nothin' to the fun that I'll show you arter a while. You'll catch somethin' worth talkin' about afore you've done your day's sport."

There was a secret meaning in his tone that made Will look up quickly into his dark face. He saw there only a sarcastic smile of threatening aspect, though it revealed nothing.

But the boy was soon too deeply interested in his sport to heed such mysterious indications. The fish bit freely, and every few minutes he added one to the heap, while Dirk caught them still more rapidly.

"They bite well in stormy weather," remarked Dirk.

"What do you call these fish?"

"Well, the most on 'em is weakfish. That chap over there is a sea-trout, and this little fellow is a bass."

"And the one I've got on my hook now?" asked Will, as he brought up a heavy fish that took all his strength to land.

"It's a sheephead!" exclaimed Dirk, with some enthusiasm, as he grasped the flapping fish. "Well done, boy. That's one of the gentleman fish of the waters. It's a wonder you fancy sports would ever be satisfied with less."

"I always catch what comes to my hook," answered Will, with easy assurance; "big fish or little. I'm after a big fish now, but I'm ready to take whatever bites."

"And I'm arter a little fish," grumbled Dirk, as he bent his dubious face over the game; "and my fish has hooked hisself a'ready. Fish o' that sort are born fools, you know."

Will cast an uneasy glance at his companion. Just what he meant was not evident, but the heedless boy began to wish that he had not been so hasty in putting himself in his power.

The afternoon was now moving rapidly on toward night. The sun was well down in the west, and as it sunk the wind strengthened. It ruffled the water before it, and struck with a shivering chill upon the bodies of the fishermen.

"Hadn't we better return?" asked Will. "It will be night in an hour more."

"Guess mebbe we had." Dirk seized the oars, and began to row onward.

"But you are going in the wrong direction."

"Reckon not. You're down here to larn somethin'. Guess I'll take you in hand, and guv you a lesson."

"What do you mean?" asked Will, alarmed and indignant.

"Oh, nothin' much. Let me tell you one thing, though. When you want to play the little game o' puttin' your head in the lion's mouth, you oughtn't to stir up the lion first."

"You mean to do me some harm, then? Is that it?"

"Oh, no! I wouldn't scrape a hair o' yer innercent head. But I'm afeared my boat ain't ristercatic enough for a nice gentleman like yer lordship. I won't ax you to stay in it."

"Then you do intend some violence?" remarked Will, with recovered coolness. "Very well, sir. I was willing to be your friend. You are determined that I shall be your enemy. I accept the decision. You can have your turn, but mine will be sure to come."

"How the little cock does crow," returned Dirk, with pretended admiration. "I'm rarely afeared to keep you aboard. My boat's too crank fur sich a lively crower. But hurt you? Mercy, no! Not fur the world."

He dropped the oars as he spoke. The boat was close on to a little low grassy island, which lay in the middle of the channel, here very wide. In a minute more the bow grounded on the island shore.

"I hope it won't hurt yer delicate feelin's if I request you to step ashore. It's a pretty little island, and you kin have it all to yerself. There'll be nothin' to trouble ye, 'cept the mosketeers; and they kin sing ye to sleep."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," cried Will. "Take me back to the town, or you shall be sorry for it."

"I ain't been sorry fur anything fur such a time, that I won't mind tryin' it on. Guess it'll feel good. Come, now, my little spark. Git-skip! Ashore with you, afore I pitch you out like a bale o' cotton."

He rose and stepped toward Will, extending his brawny arms. It was very evident that the slight-built boy would be like a feather in his grasp.

"Hands off!" cried Will, haughtily. "Don't pollute me with your touch! You are the stronger, and I must submit. But a hornet can sting an elephant. Beware, Dirk Dorgan! I will have revenge for this outrage."

He sprung ashore as he spoke.

"All right, my cove! I hope some boat will be along to take you up. But I'm sadly afeared you will have to keep company with the mosketeers all night. You kin spend your time larnin' how to keep your tongue out o' older folks' pies. Good-night and happy dreams."

He pushed off, with a mocking laugh, and rowed resolutely away, leaving Will solitary and disconsolate on the shore of the little island, whose highest spot rose scarce a foot above the high tide mark of the sea.

Not another boat was in sight. The sun sunk lower and lower. The wind swept by in fitful gales. The ruffled water beat in foam on the grassy shores. No one could tell what would be the result of that night's vigil. The sea might rise so as to sweep the island from end to end, and carry its single inhabitant out into the pitiless waves.

CHAPTER VI.

A DROWNED-OUT ISLAND.

The sun touched with its lower edge the western horizon, and shot its level rays in a last glance over the sandy plains. There was something lurid and angry in its light, and in the ashy overhanging clouds, whose edges were lit with a sulphur tinge.

The wind moaned through the desolate pines that bent their limbs away from the ocean as it fear. From far across the waters the wind rushed and whistled, heaping up the waves before it, and causing the surf to break with a hollow roar on the beach.

The tide was still rising. It was already much above its usual level, and the high-tide mark would not be reached yet for an hour.

A group of watermen stood on the beach of the old town, looking out to sea, and earnestly conversing.

"It'll be sich a tide as we ain't had since '63," remarked one. "It's a'ready a foot 'bove its highest mark, and it's got a foot more o' raise in it."

"And the surf's tremendous," replied another. "It's a marcy if the bath-houses t'other side the river don't go by the board. I've allers said they was built risky. The old ocean mought be a baby to play with when it's in a good humor. But it's a terror when it gits its mad up."

"There'll be wrecks afore the night's over," rejoined the first speaker. "There's allers some fool of a skipper to hug the shore in a nor'easter, and down he goes to Davy Jones in a whiff."

"Who's that comin'? I thought the boats was all in."

"Not quite. Jake and his boy are out yet. And—that's the t'other. That's Dirk!"

"But he's alone. Where's the boy he tuk out?"

"By the saints, he's gone and done the lad a harm arter all! If he has, boys, it's our duty to call him to quarters."

Lowering looks came upon the face of the watermen as their eyes watched the approaching boat. They were so in dread of Dirk's furious temper and giant strength that they naturally shrank from an encounter with him. But this might be a serious matter that would render some decided action necessary.

In a few minutes the boat touched the wharf, and the stalwart rower flung his oars aboard, and quickly sprung ashore, with the painter in his hand. The fishermen watched him with threatening glances.

"What have you done with the boy?" asked one of them.

"Left the imperdent little rat to cool his heels till mornin'," answered Dirk, as he secured the boat. "The chatty young lap-dog kin use his long tongue to skeer off the mosketeers, as are likely to guv him lively quarters fur the night."

"Where is he, I say?" demanded the other boldly. "Look out for yourself if any harm comes to him."

"All right, ducky," returned Dirk insolently. "He's on Pigmy Island. Guess that's big enough to hold a rooster o' his size."

"Pigmy Island!" was the hasty reply. "You can't mean it! Look at the tide, man! It's a foot above its level a'ready, and the island's under water by now. It'll raise a foot yet, and sweep the boy off into the seas."

"Not much!" answered Dirk, brutally. "Do him good to stand fur an hour or two in a foot o' water. Jist what he wants to wash some o' the nonsense outer his fresh young bide."

"This will not do, Dirk Dorgan!" returned one of the most resolute of the fishermen. "If you know when you're well off you'll go back after the lad. We may stand your airs; but we won't stand murder!"

Dirk looked around the circle of fishermen with a slow, savage glance. His giant figure seemed to grow in size, as he glowered upon them with fierce defiance in his eyes.

"You know where he is. Go fur him yerself if ye want him," he surly replied. "I promised the dirty little 'ristocrat a warmer, and he's got it. Let him drown. He kicked up the wrong cow when he tried city slack on Dirk Dorgan."

The fishermen gave way before him as he walked resolutely forward. They were not quite ready for a personal encounter with him.

They resumed their conversation as he disappeared in the distance. It ended in the untiring of a boat from the wharf, into which two of them sprung.

"We'd be aids in the murder if we let the boy stay there," cried one of them. "Give way, Joe. It's goin' to be a wild night; but it's an errand of marcy."

They bent to their oars, and the boat shot

swifly across the ruffled waters, toward where the surf broke savagely over the bar.

It was nearly two hours afterward when the boat reached the locality of the lonely island, on which Will had been left to spend the night.

The darkness had long since descended, and lay heavily on sea and shore, blending them together into one broad, even blackness. The wind came by in fierce, fitful puffs. Driving clouds fled in a wild race over the sky, now for a few minutes permitting the moon to shed its light on the troubled waters, now shrouding it in Egyptian darkness.

"Where in the blazes is the island, Joe?" demanded one of the watermen, as he rested for a moment on his oars, and peered deeply into the gloom.

"It ought to be close at hand," answered Joe. "That last glint of the moon showed us the swell of the inlet where the island lays like a baby in its cradle. I wish yonder tarnation cloud'd drift off, and give us another glimpse."

"Bet high it's drowned out," returned his companion. "'Cause we must lie close on. Gi'n her a set this way. If I ain't fooled myself—Hello! what's that?"

This exclamation was called forth by a sudden check to their speed, that nearly flung both rowers backward off their seats. They looked hastily around, but nothing was visible. Joe plunged his hand into the water and plucked up a handful of grass.

"Jist so," he declared. "Thought I weren't mistaken. We're grounded on the island. It's under water, sure enough. But where in the blue blazes is the boy? Can you see a hair o' his young hide?"

"Nary hair. Shoot that lazy moon! Why don't it bu'st out?"

He put his hands to his lips, and broke out into a stentorian hail.

"Ahoy, lad! Ahoy! Whar be ye? Yell, if you're in hearin'."

His cry rung far over the waters, and was swept ashore by the winds, but no answer came. All sunk into silence again, except for the unceasing whistling of the wind and the swash of the water against their boat.

They waited for a moment, with gathering awe. Then Joe sprung hastily from the boat to the submerged surface of the island. The water came half-way to his knees, as he stood upright. He walked out in different directions, but found the water to constantly deepen. He looked at his companion with staring eyes.

"It's all up with the poor lad," he muttered in awe-struck tones. "This is the highest spot on the island. He's gone! Murdered! You can't call it by no sweeter name."

"But to think on it! Not a foot o' water, and no breakers! What's took the boy over? You'd thought a baby'd 'a' stood out the tide."

"But ther's no backbone in these city chickens. The water's cold, too. Maybe the delicate lad got chilled through and gi'n up the fight."

"Mought be tuk off by a boat?"

"Mighty poor chance. Every boat was in but Jake Dumps's when we set out. S'pose he is in afore now."

As he spoke the moon suddenly broke through a rift in the clouds, and poured its clear beams down upon the ruffled waters.

Nothing was visible but an angry stretch of foam. No trace remained in land or sea of the abandoned boy. The eyes of the fishermen met in a questioning glance.

"What's your verdict, Joe?"

"Bloody murder's my verdict. What's yours?"

"Manslaughter, Joe. Tain't murder where 'tain't intended. I know enough law fur that. But Dirk Dorgan is got to answer fur this."

"I calkerlate he has," answered Joe, with gloomy determination. "Bend to yer oars again. We've done our duty. It's the law that's to do the balance."

An hour and more afterward the group of watermen, who yet stood on the wharf looking out into the gloom that shrouded the waters, heard the swash of oars, and soon saw two dim figures emerge from the shadowy night.

"Ahoy, there! Is that you, Joe and Jesse?"

"It's not Joe and Jesse; but it's Jake and Tony," came the answer from the darkness, as the boat shot up to the wharf.

"Jake! What has kept you? Do you bring good news? Have you seen anything of the boy that Dirk took out?"

"The boy!" demanded Jake, in a tone of alarm. "What's wrong? Has anything bad come to the boy?"

"Yes. Dirk sot him ashore on Pigmy Island. It's swept by the seas long afore now, and we're desp'r'at afear'd there's mischief afoot."

"The deuce! And on a night like this! I've been belated by some prime fishin', and passed there arter dark. Dirk Dorgan! This is clear ag'in' reason! Has some o' the boys gone out to 'vestigate?'

"Yes."

One hope had died in Jake's answer. Nothing remained but to wait for the return of the two messengers.

Another half-hour passed slowly by. Then the sound of oars was again borne in by the wind. A momentary moon-gleam broke out from the cloud-drift and fell upon the approaching boat. Only two figures appeared, rowing silently onward.

No hail met them. The waiting fishermen shrunk from losing the last remnants of hope. The boat touched the wharf, and its tenants sprung out, without a word.

Only then did the oldest member of the party break the silence.

"What news?" he asked. "Is it good or bad?"

"Bad," answered Joe, gloomily. "The island is drowned, and the boy, too, I reckon. There's not a lock of his hair left to tell that he was ever there."

A momentary hush, and then a cry of anger broke from one of the listeners.

"By all that's good, then, Dirk Dorgan's got to answer for this murder! He's been bulldog o' the town fur many a year, lads, but he's come to the end of his rope. He must be arrested, instanter."

"Maybe he's foolin' us," answered another. "Moughtn't have left the boy there arter all."

"Where is he, then? That's the question. We've got to hold Dirk till the mystery's settled. If the boy turns up, well and good. If he's gone under, Dirk's confessed his murder."

"Tell you what, boys," broke in the cautious patriarch of the village. "Tain't best to move too hasty. It's my advice that we put a watch 'round Dirk's house for the night! To-morrow, if the boy don't come to light, we can get word over to the magistrate in the new town, and fotch him here with a warrant. That looks to me the judgmatrical thing."

"There's sound sense in that," answered several of the others. "Two or three of us will be watch enough to see that he don't slide afore daylight. The rest can take their snooze."

This reasonable plan was decided upon, and the guard appointed to keep watch on Dirk's cottage.

As they came up in front of it the sturdy ruffian opened his door and stepped out, in the rays of the lamplight from inside the cottage.

He glared for a moment angrily at the group of men, while a look came over his face as if he had divined their purpose at a glance. He advanced a step, apparently with the intention of accosting them. But he seemed to change his mind before speaking, and retired again to his cottage, shutting the door angrily behind him.

"The bulldog has drawn back into his kennel," said one of the guards. "There we must keep him. Take your stations all, and keep open eyes. It's clear he's took the hint."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BIRD OUT OF THE CAGE.

THE night passed on in gloom and shadow. Still the wind howled, and the waves broke in a roar of thunder on the beach. Over in the new town lights were visible till late in the night. The fierce surf had carried away the strong board walk that fronted the town, lifting it like a feather, and dashing it back as if in disdain, rent into fragments. Many of the bath-houses, too, had sunk into the waves, and their splintered relics were tossed in shattered heaps on the shore, lifting and grinding with every fresh wave.

The excitement which this occasioned hardly extended beyond the river to the old town. It was built too high for danger, the boats had been secured early in the evening, and the tide was now falling. There was no need to keep vigil, except around the cottage of Dirk Dorgan, where the guard still kept up its vigilant watch.

Shortly after midnight this guard was relieved by three others, who volunteered to continue the watch until daybreak.

"What's the report?" asked Jake Dumps, who was one of this new patrol. "Has he been astir?"

"A bit; 'arly in the night. But latterly he's been as quiet as a mouse in a cheese. Keep wide awake. He's a cunnin' varmint."

"Ay, ay! Good-night."

The remaining hours of the night moved

silently on. The gloom continued deep and heavy. The soothng wind broke through the fir branches. From afar came the heavy roar of the sea. Finally a drizzling rain dripped down, forcing the vigilant guard to retire under the shelter of neighboring trees. But they remained stationed at three points so as to command the whole circumference of the cottage. It seemed as if a cat could not have crept past unseen. Yet nothing appeared. Dirk seemed to be passing the night in quiet slumber.

The first glow of the coming morning shed a lurid light upon the eastern clouds. The tide was again rising, but it promised to be not nearly so high as on the preceding evening. Long before daybreak a boat, manned by two oarsmen, had set out from the town, and was now far up the inlet. It had been decided to take a daylight view of the situation before proceeding to extremities. Dirk might have lied. The boy may have been left on the main island, where he would be safe. It was best to be sure on this point ere going too far.

The sun was about two hours high when this party of investigation returned. The boy was not with them; that it needed no words to tell.

"What news?" demanded old Toby, the patriarch of the town.

"The lad has vanished. Dirk told the truth. He was left on Pigmy Island."

"Are you sure?"

"We found this lodged on the island shore."

He held up a soaked cap, which was quickly recognized as the one that Will had worn the day before. The hardy watermen drew their breaths hard.

"That settles it," declared old Toby, solemnly. "The lad's gone to Davy Jones, and Dirk Dorgan's responsible for his death."

A hush followed. It was a moment of awe and excitement. Murder had been done, not with deliberate intention, but in fact. A serious duty lay upon the inhabitants of the town. The pause of indecision ended by Toby leaping into the boat, and seizing the oars.

"We must stick to the law," he said. "You two come with me. We will cross to the new town, and lay our charge before the squire. This thing must be done by regular warrant, served by a constable."

The fishermen, who shrunk from a personal encounter with their powerful and fearless neighbor, willingly accepted this solution of the difficulty, and waited with impatience during the hour of old Toby's absence. At the end of that time he returned, accompanied by the constable. Several other boats, containing inhabitants of the new town, came with him. The news of the crime had spread rapidly from the magistrate's office, and created a considerable excitement. A throng of people followed the constable in his movement toward Dirk's cottage.

"How lays the land?" asked this official. "Is he about? Has he shown any signs of escap-ing?"

"He has not moved a finger, night nor morn-ing," answered one of the fishermen. "His house was watched all night by keen eyes. Since morning it has kept shut close, and not a whisper has come from it. Dirk smells what's in the wind, and is playing sullen. But you must look out. That kind, when they do break out, are like mad bulls."

"I fancy I'll tame him," answered the constable, with a quiet smile. "Stand back, gentlemen. It is possible it may come to a matter of bullets, and a crowd is an awkward background for pistol practice."

This cool advice caused a sudden halt in the throng of followers. They had no fancy for acting as targets. The guard, who still stood around the house, advanced to meet the constable, as he approached the door.

"We hardly know what to make of it," said the foremost of them. "For six hours there has not been a stir inside. He's there, as close as a bee in a blossom. A fly could not have passed our guard. But this silence is strange. Can the man have made an end of himself?"

"Not he. He isn't that sort."

The officer knocked vigorously upon the door.

"Dirk!" he cried, in a decided tone. "Come out. You're wanted. Skulking won't serve you."

No answer came from within. A deathlike silence continued.

"This is strange," muttered the officer, as he laid his hand on the knob of the door, and gave it a quick turn. To his surprise the door opened

at a touch. It was not locked as he had fully expected to find it.

The main room of the cottage lay open before his eyes. It was empty.

The constable turned and spoke a few words to the men behind him. Some of them moved to the rear door of the building. Others followed him into the house.

It contained but four rooms, two above and two below. There were no cellars. It took scarcely a minute to investigate these rooms, though it needed to be done with some caution, in consideration of the sort of man with whom they had to deal.

Yet caution proved unnecessary. The rooms were empty. Dirk had disappeared.

It was an utterly unexpected result of the search. What had become of him? The guard, who pressed eagerly forward, declared positively that he had not left the building under their eyes. He was not a bird to fly, nor a mole to excavate. How had he escaped?

They looked blankly at one another, in dismay and astonishment. The crowd outside had pushed into the house at this astounding news. The search as yet had not been thorough. There were closets, beds, and other places to be examined. But a few minutes sufficed to investigate every nook of the house. The result was the same. Dirk had vanished.

The crowd pushed out again, to talk over this unexplained riddle, while the constable began a more careful investigation, in hopes of finding some clew to the mystery.

Almost every article in the house was closely examined. Some few discoveries resulted. Dirk had formerly kept a housekeeper, but for the last year or two had lived alone doing his own cooking, and surrounded by a very sparse array of furniture.

Yet some things were missing. The clothes he wore in his fishing excursions had been left behind, and his best suit taken. Certain light articles which he was known to possess had also vanished. He had evidently made his escape in some mysterious manner, and taken such of his possessions as he particularly valued with him.

"You may think you have done your best," said the constable sarcastically to the watchmen, "but it is plain he has been too smart for you. The business is in my hands now. He is a fugitive murderer. I will have him, if I have to search the whole State from end to end."

In fact, more events had occurred during the preceding night than the cordon of watchmen fancied. As we have no desire to keep the reader in the same mystery as troubled the townsmen, we must go back a few hours into the darkness, and trace the cause of Dirk's disappearance.

There is an old fable which relates that a lion which had been taken in a net, was released by the teeth of a gnawing mouse. It was the same with Dirk; a mouse had freed the lion.

Silent as Dirk had continued during the early portion of the night, he had not been asleep; in fact, the fierce ruffian was for once in his life frightened at the consequences of his brutality.

The one thing he feared was the law, and he had always cunningly kept clear of its fangs. But now, through a bit of willful spite, he had fallen into its meshes, and dreaded the most serious consequences of his misdeed.

He had managed to overbear all that had passed among the fishermen, and knew well that he was liable to a charge of manslaughter, and to a long term of imprisonment.

That the boy had been swept away by the waves he did not doubt, and already the pallid countenance of a drowned form rose frightfully before his awakened imagination.

Conscience carries a keen whip, and the most hardened nature is not proof against its stings. He would have given all he possessed to be able to live over again the past few hours.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The second watch had long been set. Silent as Dirk kept, he knew all that was going on without. He now sat near the rear door of his cottage, his chin on his hand, half inclined to make a rush for freedom, yet afraid that any haste to escape would act as new evidence against him.

Suddenly he started as if he had been stung. A light, tapping sound had come upon the door. He sprung to his feet in mingled surprise and superstition.

It was repeated—a distinct but faint rap!

Dirk stood irresolute, his eyes fixed on the door. His usual prompt decision failed him for once in his life.

The latch was lifted. The door, which was unlocked, opened. A diminutive form slipped in,

and closed the door behind him. He stood in the light of the lowered lamp, a short, boyish figure, facing the astonished ruffian.

"Who the blazes are you? And what are you arter?" queried Dirk, in a low, hollow tone.

"Guess you oughter know me," replied the boy boldly. "I'm Tony Thorne. I'm Jake Dumps's nevey. I owe you one, and I've come to pay you."

"Owe me one?"

"You bet I do! You saved me from a duckin' this afternoon. Mebbe you've forgot it, but I hain't. You're in a awful scrape, Dirk, and I've come to dig you out."

Dirk looked at him for a minute with wild eyes. He then eagerly extended his hand, and grasped Tony's shoulder.

"Come in here out o' earshot," he demanded. "Blast me if I don't like yer! Come here, and let's hear what's in the wind."

Tony followed him to an up-stairs room, where they sat in the gloom of the night.

"Now, midget, peg in. I'm listenin'!"

"It's just this, Dirk," began Thorny Tony, in a decisive tone. "That boy's drownded, and it's odd if they don't stretch your neck for it. They've got it in their wool, now I tell you. You've only got two friends left in the town."

"Who's them?" queried Dirk.

"That's me, and uncle Jake. I'd been drownded mebbe this afternoon only you snatched me out. Weain't forgot that. What's more, I hate that little aristocrat like p'izen. Me and him had a squabble only t'other day; and I think you served him jist right. Now I'm here to git you out of this scrape."

"It can't be did," rejoined Dirk. "The guard's on. If I movod a foot they'd have the whole town, like barkin' curs, at my heels."

"Not much," answered Tony. "That ain't the way I do bizness. Jist listen to me. Uncle Jake's on the guard. He's stationed right back o' this door. You kin slip out and away. He won't see you. Take my word for that."

Dirk glared at the confident boy in hope and surprise.

"Why, ye're jist a little hoss!" he declared. "But, what's the use? I've got no hidin'-place. They'll pick me up like a stray log in the harbor."

"Trust me for that," replied Tony, in a tone of assurance. "Uncle Jake and me ain't slouches, to half do our jobs. I'll take you to a spot where you won't be found soon, I promise you. But I tell you what it is, if you have anything here you value you'd best take it with you. It maybe a long day afore you come back. And this place 'll be s'arched severe, now you bet. Hunt out your valybles. I'll slip out and wait for you jist back of Joe Blizard's house. You needn't be afearred to go past uncle Jake. He'll have his eyes tight shut."

The scared ruffian caught Tony by the shoulder, and looked searchingly in his face. The boy bore the scrutiny without flinching. Dirk released him with an air of satisfaction.

"I'll do it," he said. "You're true grit. Wait outside. I'll join you in ten minutes."

Tony obeyed without a word. He had his object in leaving Dirk awhile alone. The ten minutes passed. The solitary ruffian prowled about his house, going through some strange evolutions, as he made up a small bundle of the objects he wished to take with him.

"Won't do to leave it behind," he muttered. "They mought find the package and hand it over to Wilson. I'll have my revenge out on that man if I spend my whole life in it. Won't never let up the squeeze I've got on him."

The darkness was intense as he slipped out into the air. He could vaguely see the form of the watchman. He walked silently on. It proved as Tony had said. The guard stood motionless, while he slipped quietly past. In a few moments more he was at the appointed rendezvous.

"Jolly!" remarked Tony, suddenly making his appearance. "Come on. Part of the job's done, but there's more afore us."

CHAPTER VIII.

THORNY TONY GETS IN HIS WORK.

"I TELL you they've got it ag'in' you blue. Jist you put that down in yer 'count-book."

The speaker was Tony Thorne. He was driving along in a one-horse, tumble-down old gig, through the shadowy reaches of the night, with Dirk Dorgan for a companion.

"If you'd a' heered 'em like I did, spoutin' out spite, it'd made yer blood crawl," continued Tony, in a sepulchral voice. "They ain't in love with you now, nary time; and they've got the drop on you, dead sure. Why, it wouldn't

take much fur 'em to hung you up, without judge or jury."

Dirk's veins tingled at this information. Bold and reckless as he was, the thought of hanging was anything but an agreeable one, and he knew well that he had made himself hated in the village by his overbearing disposition.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked, peering out into the darkness. "If you run me into any trap, you young rascal, I'll cure you of all tricks for the rest o' yer nat'r'l life."

"Look's like it, don't it?" rejoined Tony, scornfully. "When I've jist pulled yer neck outer the hangman's noose! Tain't much use workin' for a feller like you, that ain't got no more conscience nor a bread-puddin' has dumpin's."

"But, where are you takin' me? That's what I want to know."

"And it's what you won't know. It's a secret hidin'-place, as uncle Jake knows, and you've got to go in there unbeknownst. I ain't bored this high-up hoss and stylish kerridge fur fun, now you bet."

"A secret place of Jake Dumps! Lord, you don't tell me that! I allers thought that sly old coon had more tricks nor fishin' and gunnin'. So the cat's comin' out the bag, hey?"

He laughed boarishly, with a forced merriment. He was evidently trying to throw off the weight of his own troubles.

"Jist you never mind that. Uncle Jake allers butters his own bread. Don't ax nobody to do it fur him. But you've got to blindfold your eyes afore you go into his den."

"What fer?"

"So you won't know where it is, that's all. He don't trust nobody as mought blab on him."

"He's an old crocodile. Blast me if I'll do any sich nonsense!"

"All right. Then you kin drive yerself. Tain't much I keer."

"You dirty rascallion! You shall drive me there."

"Like to know how you're goin' to make me."

Dirk caught the arm of his tantalizing companion in a fierce grip, and bent his lowering eyes with a threatening look upon his face.

"Maybe you don't know what it is to play with a man like me!" he hissed.

"Maybe not," answered Tony, without flinching. "But I know this much. You kin squeeze a pig's tail till you make him boller; but he won't go where you want fer all your squeezin'. Go ahead, Dirk," he dropped the reins. "You're goin' to make me drive, are you? Let's see you do it."

Dirk grasped his other arm, and twisted him around until they sat face to face. The ruffian bent forward until his face almost touched that of the unflinching boy. The words came hissing from his lips.

"Blast yer young hide, I'll kill you as I did the other! Do as I bid, or I'll have more than one to hang for."

"And hang for it you will," answered Tony, boldly. "There's a man in town knows where I am. Let me be missin', and salt won't save you."

Dirk was fairly nonplussed. Despite his threats he did not dare do his companion an injury, and Tony well knew that. The fierce looks and tones of the ruffian were thrown away on the shrewd boy.

"I'll be shot if I'll go into any hole like a muffled rat!" he declared, violently, but with a hesitating tone.

"Dig out, then, if you've got a better way," answered Tony. "If you go with me you've got to go my way. Jist h'ist that into yer pipe and smoke it."

The baffled villain dropped the unyielding boy with a gesture of despite. He could hardly check himself from dealing him a fierce blow with his iron fist. But the moment was a perilous one. It would not do to lose his only friend.

"Is it far to go?" he asked, more mildly.

"That's my bizness," answered Tony. "The night's dark enough to bide anything, but I won't trust it. You've got to have your eyes blinded. That's uncle Jake's orders."

Dirk angrily jerked a huge red handkerchief from his pocket, and bound it over his eyes.

"Hope that'll suit yer idees. Drive on now, you nagging little whelp."

Tony inspected the bandage. Satisfied that it was secure, he took up the reins, and set the horse again into a trot. How he had, in a few days' residence, learned enough of the country to go on a long drive of a dark night did not appear. But, a wide-awake boy, like Thorny Tony, is quick at taking things in.

He had already driven for an hour. He continued his course for nearly a half-hour more. At the end of that time he stopped the horse, and took Dirk by the arm.

"Come now," he whispered. "Be very keerful 'bout noise. We are not far away from ears, and there's a bit o' ground to tramp over."

Ten minutes of cautious progress succeeded. Then a door was carefully opened, and closed behind them. Their feet were no longer upon the earth. The firm resistance of a wooden floor was beneath them.

Tony continued to lead his blinded companion. A second door was opened, which seemed to admit them to another room. It closed again, and the voice of Tony came, in muffled accents, as if from a distance:

"You kin take off the handkercher now. But, mind me. Don't poke yer nose outer these doors, if you don't want to git into trouble. You've got to keep as close as a muskrat in a mud-bank."

Dirk hastily jerked off the bandage from his eyes, and looked inquiringly around him. He was alone. Tony had disappeared.

A turned-down lamp faintly illuminated the apartment in which he stood. It was a small room, about twelve feet square, with a bare floor and sparse furniture. There was nothing about it to indicate anything secret or mysterious. Such an apartment might have belonged to any country house, or fisherman's cottage.

Dirk continued to look about him, with a gaze of sharp investigation. The room was strange to him, yet not wholly so. There hung over it a vague sense of familiarity, which he could not penetrate.

He tried the door to discover if he was a prisoner. No, it opened easily to his hand. A larger room was dimly visible. But Tony had vanished. No trace of his diminutive form was to be seen.

Dirk seated himself, and dropped into a deep train of reflection. He had been hurried onward so rapidly for the last hour or two as to give him no time to think. This was the first moment in which he had a chance for deliberate thought. He began to measure his situation.

The man was of a suspicious temperament, and there had been much in the late events to arouse his suspicions. Why had Jake Dumps so suddenly become his friend? He had shown no disposition of the kind before, and Tony's explanation was not a very satisfactory one. And what sort of a secret apartment was this? He had been led to expect some cunningly contrived hiding-place; yet here he was in the room of an ordinary house.

He rose hastily, and strode through the front room to the door, determined to settle this mystery at once. He laid his hand on the door. It failed to yield. He was locked in, after all!

Dirk looked at the door, and drew back his ponderous fist, with a half-formed intention to dash it through the stout panels. But he hesitated. Tony's warning was not without its effect upon him. He might be running into some unknown danger.

It was certain that he had been rescued from a perilous situation. Why should he mistrust those who had rescued him at their own risk? He could be no worse off now than before.

Dirk reseated himself and resumed his reflections, his dark face working as the thoughts passed successively through his mind.

Suddenly he sprung up, and brought down his fist with a heavy blow on the table before him, while a look of malignant meaning came into his eyes.

"I've got it, by Davy Jones!" he exclaimed. "A dashed fool I was not to see through it at once! If Mark Wilson ain't at the bottom of this you kin salt me down fur a herring! He's tried a hundred different tricks to salivate me, and this is the last. Hang me if I didn't think it thunderin' queer that Jake Dumps struck a nevey so sudden! See it all now. It's one o' Wilson's games. Aha! thought he'd catch the old coon, did he? Got me to bring the papers with me, so as they could go through me! Blast me if that ain't keen! Next thing they'll fetch the officers down on me, and s'arch me, and snatch the dockyments. I see through it now, clear to the bottom. But it won't work, Mark Wilson. I've sworn to have my revenge to the bitter end, and have it I will, if I have to burn the papers. You ain't goin' to git the whip hand of ole Dirk Dorgan so easy."

He sat thinking for some minutes still. Then he seized the lamp, and started on a tour of inspection of the house. He wanted to see how the land lay ere he decided on any plan of action.

A pair of stairs led to an upper story, consist-

ing of two rooms, which he quickly examined. They were plainly furnished, and had about them that aspect of vague familiarity which he had already observed.

"I've been here afore," he declared to himself, "though I can't just nail the spot. What's come o' that boy! Is he off to fetch the bloodhounds on my track? By old Neptune, I'll cheat Mark Wilson! I wanted to keep these papers fur the boy's good arter me and Wilson was both gone to pot, but I can't bide 'em here, and there's nothin' fur it but a quick blaze and a pile of ashes. That ends it. He'll never squeeze the truth out o' me, arter the papers is gone."

He removed the chimney of the lamp with a firm hand. He then took from the bosom of his sea-shirt a narrow roll of papers, which he advanced toward the naked flame.

"So ends the hopes of Mark Wilson's heir," he muttered, "and the secret I have guarded for twenty years."

As he spoke, his eyes fell upon a spot upon the wall which he had noted before, where hung a framed portrait of a middle-aged gentleman.

His eyes distended with sudden horror as he again noted the picture. The frame was still there, but the portrait had disappeared. Or rather it had been replaced by a life-size youthful face, with staring eyes and a countenance as white as driven snow. No wonder that Dirk Dorgan was stricken with horror. It was the face of the drowned boy!

A gasp of wild terror came from the lips of the startled ruffian. He slowly retreated, holding the lamp in one hand and the papers in the other, his eyes fixed in speechless affright on the deathlike apparition.

The eyes and lips of the figure moved. Hollow tones came from the lips.

"Murderer!" pulsed the voice. "It is I, your victim! Your doom is sealed!"

With a terrible yell Dirk let fall the lamp and the roll, and dashed down the stairs almost at a single spring. Like a wild bull he rushed at the house door, which flew open before his powerful impetus.

Blind with terror he sprung out into the night. But in an instant he halted and looked around him with a new sensation. What were these houses, that stream? One glance was enough. He was still in the town of Micmac! He had been completely fooled! Dirk's terror vanished before this astounding revelation. The whole thing was a trick. This apparition was a part of the trick. He turned and dashed back into the house and up the stairs as wildly as he had dashed down. His eyes quickly glanced around. There hung the portrait, as it had at first hung. There lay the lamp, unbroken and still burning. But the valuable roll of papers? In vain he sought! It had utterly disappeared!

CHAPTER IX.

PICKING UP DROPPED THREADS.

We must stop for awhile and look back. One can not go on forever in life without an occasional turn-back in his path in search of something which he has passed unseen. It is so in our present story. There are some dropped threads in its context, which we must go back and pick up.

In fact the face in the picture, which had for the moment so startled the rugged soul of Dirk Dorgan, was no apparition, but the countenance of a living being. Will Worth had not become the prey of the sea, as every one imagined, and the method of his escape from his perilous situation needs to be made clear.

There is another matter also which requires explanation, the sudden gratitude which Tony had developed for Dirk Dorgan. All these arose from events of the early portion of that night which had made such a sensation in the village of Micmac.

It will be remembered that when Dirk Dorgan had set out on his fishing excursion with Will, they had been followed at a distance by the boat containing Jake Dumps and his ready-made nephew. The latter had lagged behind, out of sight of the forward boat, but yet at no great distance in the rear.

Jake and Tony threw in their lines at a fishing ground a few miles up the inlet, where they continued to fish for some time with considerable success. The afternoon waned while they were thus occupied, the sun had sunk low in the west, and they flung in for a final throw, Tony remarking:

"Arter this pull we'd best take a tug at the oars further up channel. T'other boat's makin' a long spell, and I'm cur'us to see if ther' ain't some deviltry afoot."

"Don't b'lieve there is," answered Jake, with

a shake of the head. "Dirk knows he's watched, and he won't try no capers. If he hurt the boy he'd get in trouble."

"Little he keers when he's got his mad up," answered Tony. "Bet you I wouldn't trust none o' my eggs in his pocket. But Lawsee! there he comes now; and no Will with him!"

It was as he said. Dirk's boat had just turned a corner of the channel ahead, and was coming swiftly onward, impelled by his vigorous strokes.

Jake and Tony had now got to their oars and rowed out into the channel, in the track of the coming boat.

"Hello, Dirk!" cried the old fisherman. "What's come o' the lad as you tuk out with you?"

"Left the bloody young bull-hound to cool his heels on the island," answered Dirk, brutally. "He's so rascally smart that a night's out-door coolin' mought do him some good."

"Come, come, that won't do!" exclaimed Jake. "He'll be swallowed alive by 'skeeters. Best go back and take him off."

"Much I will."

"Then I'm hanged if I don't!"

"You will, hey?" cried Dirk, angrily. "You'll spoil my fun, Jake Dumps! Maybe you've forgot the kind o' chap I am. Now, jist you snatch your oars and row down channel ahead o' me, or shoot me if I leave a whole bone in yer dirty hide. Dig out now. I mean it."

Jake, indignant as he was, knew his antagonist too well to dare disregard this threat. Dirk never multiplied his words. He was just the man to do what he had promised. The old fisherman, who was no match for his brawny opponent, resumed his oars, and with a long sweep sent the boat spinning down the channel.

This movement had an unexpected result. It unluckily happened that just at that moment Tony had left his seat at the tiller, and was walking forward along the gunwale, for some unexplained purpose. The sudden movement of the boat gave him a leeward jerk, and ere he could regain his footing he toppled overboard with a heavy splash.

The boat sped on under the impetus, leaving him struggling in the water. Tony's city life had left his education deficient in one respect. He did not know how to swim. Thus his situation was really dangerous. He might sink ere the boat could be turned back to his rescue.

But Dirk had been resting on his oars not far in the rear. A hoarse laugh came from his bearded lips as he saw the plunge of the unlucky boy. But he dropped his oars into the water, gave the boat a send forward, and in an instant had Tony by the collar.

A quick jerk by his strong arm, and the drenched lad was lifted as if he had been a feather.

"There! Stand there and drip," cried Dirk, roughly. "And try and git yer sea legs afore ye go boatin' ag'in."

Tony was dripping and shaking himself when Jake's boat came gliding up alongside of Dirk's.

"Jump aboard, boy. You're none the worse for the duckin'," he cried. "Much obleeged, Dirk. Likely ye've saved the lad from drownin'."

"Poh! He's not the first puppy I've snatched out of the water," answered Dirk, in an insulting tone. "Push on now, Jake. I ain't goin' to leave you behind me."

The fisherman obeyed, while Tony sat shivering in the cool night air. He had at first felt a feeling of gratitude toward Dirk, but this last speech had caused a revulsion in his mind. It was not so pleasant to be compared to a drowning puppy.

"All right, Dirk Dorgan," he muttered to himself. "You won't have me for a friend, then. I'm your drowned puppy, am I? Look out the puppy don't bite. I'm old enough anyhow to have my eyes open, if I am a puppy."

The two boats moved on over the roughened surface of the water, Jake in advance, until a mile or two had been passed. This brought them to the mouth of the inlet. The sun was now low, and the gloom of the coming night was descending on the waters. It was the night of the great storm, the wind was blowing in fierce gusts, and betw'en the entrance to the inlet and the mouth of the river was a dangerous reach, where the surf broke at an alarming height.

It was now "save who can." The two rowers paid no further attention to one another, but each worked for his own salvation in the inner edge of the boiling surf. Dirk's vigorous sweep soon drove his boat in advance of Jake's, which labored in the foaming sea-edge behind. The stalwart ruffian turned into the mouth of the

river, while his followers were yet little beyond the inlet.

"Good! He's out o' sight now!" cried Tony. "Turn back. We must git that boy off. Wouldn't leave him out sich a night as this fur a ship-load o' gold."

"It can't be did," returned Jake, with a doubtful shake of the head. "'Tain't in the oars. It's an ugly night, and we've got our own lives to save."

"Mighty nice!" rejoined Tony. "But if you don't take him off, hang the cent will you ever see of Mark Wilson's money. I tell you he sets store by the boy, and he's got cash enough to stuff a cow with greenbacks."

This inducement made a sudden change in old Jake's intentions. In a moment he swirled the boat around, and rowed for the mouth of the inlet.

"Steer keerful," he warned. "Keep her grindin' the sand. If we git out into the breaker-line it'll beat down the boat like it would a feather."

Tony, who had learned the art of steering, skillfully obeyed; and they were soon within the smoother waters of the inlet.

They rowed back in silence. The night was rapidly approaching, and by the time they had gained their late fishing-grounds, a thick duskiness had replaced the daylight.

"Keep a sharp lookout on the island now," warned Jake. "The moon's up, and there's a shadder o' daylight yit. If he's a-standin' there, you kin see him. Let out a yell now and then. The lad mought be crouchin' in the weeds."

The boat was close along the edge of the main island, where it continued to advance, while Tony kept his keen young eyes sweeping the low-lying land. Occasionally, also, he gave a shrill cry, which rung high above the roar of the wind.

They moved on in this way for some two or three miles. It had now become quite dark, but the moon had risen into a bank of broken clouds, which permitted an occasional glimpse of the island surface. Tony continued his shrill calls at frequent intervals.

Suddenly there came a faint answer; but to their surprise, it did not come from the direction of the island. It seemed to come from over the open water to the left. There was a momentary lull in the wind, and Tony repeated his call. The reply came again, louder and clearer than before.

"It's no gull, at any rate!" he cried, twisting round.

"Do you see anything?" asked Jake.

"Nothin' but a dim shadow. It's pitch dark theraway."

"Let me git my eyes on it."

The experienced old fisherman bent low, and looked across the surface of the ruffled water. He spoke after a minute's observation.

"There's summat there, but I can't make it out clear. It's like a floatin' buoy. Keep yer eyes open while I set the boat over."

The vague upright line which they had observed grew clearer as the boat moved toward it. It seemed to move. Tony called again.

"Ahoy!"

"Hereaway," came a distinct answer.

"Is it a man, a boy, or a hobgoblin?"

"A boy. And pretty near a ghost."

The boat was now close at hand.

"Is it you, Will Worth?"

"Nobody else. Is that you, Tony Thorne?"

"You bet."

"Then thank Heaven! for the sea would have swept me off in an hour more."

The boat suddenly grounded. Jake dropped his oars and sprung up, with a keen look around him.

"It's Pigmy Island, or I'm a sinner!" he ejaculated. "All under water, and the boy left there to drown! Blame my top-knot if I thought Dirk Dorgan was sich a murderin' hog! I'll lay him out for this, if I don't, shoot me! Come, poor feller, step aboard. You've had a narrer squeeze fur it. You kin thank Tony here fur yer life."

Will had already made his way through the water, and stepped into the boat with Tony's aid. He was shivering with cold, but he warmly grasped the hands of both his rescuers, while tears stood in his eyes.

"If I ever can return this, I will, you can depend on that," he gratefully declared. "An hour more there I would have chilled through and dropped into the water. As for Dirk Dorgan, I won't forget him either."

"Mighty rough quarters, Will," remarked Tony, as he again pressed his hand.

"The water did one good job, though."

"What was that?"

"It drowned out the mosquitoes. There were millions of them I do believe, before the tide swept over the island."

The laugh which this speech occasioned, broke the serious feelings which had filled their spirits at first.

Jake, with undiminished vigor, began to row back, down the channel. As they proceeded, they fell into an earnest conversation, in which the proper course to be pursued, was discussed.

"Hush!" cried Tony, at length. "There are oars."

Jake stopped rowing. They fell into a deep silence. The roll of oars, which the wind had brought to their ears, came nearer. The moon was now overclouded, and they saw only a faint shadow on the dark waters, as the coming boat drew near.

Its inmates were loudly talking, and they passed near enough for every word to be distinctly heard. The subject of their conversation was deeply interesting to the three listeners. Tony, in fact, was on the point of replying, but he was checked by the cautious old man.

"Not a word," said Jake, in low tones. "Let 'em go on. The thing's workin' neat."

In a few minutes more the boat was out of hearing. It was the boat which had been sent out to Pigmy Island to Will's rescue, and the subject of conversation of its rowers had been the suspicions of murder entertained against Dirk Dorgan.

"Let 'em go," again remarked Jake. "They'll fetch in a bad report, and maybe Dirk'll be jerked fur the murder. We must keep the boy shady for a while. Somethin' neat mought come outen this."

They resumed their progress, laying a plot against Dirk Dorgan as they did so. The result of this plot we have seen. Will was landed in a solitary spot, and afterward conducted unseen to Jake's cottage, where he was concealed in an unused apartment. To this same cottage Dirk was, at a later hour, conducted, through the skillful maneuvers of Tony, who had managed to completely humbug the shrewd villain.

We have seen the finale. The picture against the wall was one of old Jake's fancies. It was really movable, and formed the cover to a small window, leading into the room in which Will was concealed.

The hidden youth had overheard Dirk's words and opened the window for an observation, at the very instant that the startled villain looked up. It is not surprising that the latter was frightened. Will himself was scared, and turned so pale that his face really appeared of deathly hue.

Yet startled as the boy was by the discovery, his quick wit at once took in the situation, and he improvised, on the spur of the moment, the sepulchral words which had thrown Dirk into such terror.

Nor was Will less active in another direction. Dirk had hardly disappeared ere he sprung into the room, seized the valuable roll of papers from the floor, and made a hasty retreat.

"I wonder who's got the bull by the horns now?" he triumphantly cried. "Left me to be drowned on an island, did you? I've a notion I'll be even with you for it. We've won our game, and must make tracks. Mr. Wilson will give half his fortune for this little bundle of papers."

CHAPTER X.

A DOUBLE CHASE.

WE have already in a preceding chapter described the events of the morning which followed the stirring night of the storm. Dirk had disappeared, as we know. He was not to be found in the village. But Will also had vanished, and the inhabitants were more convinced of the murder than ever.

The constable at once set himself in pursuit of the fugitive, first searching the town and the houses in its vicinity, and then starting out on a wider exploration of the surrounding country.

It was an opportunity to distinguish himself such as he had never before possessed, and he was bound to make the most of it.

Still another inmate of the village had disappeared, as Jake Dumps had discovered on his return to his habitation. Tony had vanished. He was not to be found within the boundaries of Micmac, and the old fellow, who had taken a great fancy to his new-made nephew, was in a serious fret at his disappearance.

As it is of immense importance to our story to know what had become of these vanished

persons, we must return to the cover of the night, and seek to trace their movements.

Will Worthy, on his escape from the cottage, had been forced to slip behind the door as Dirk furiously returned, and rushed up the stairs which he had just descended.

Will quickly slipped out into the night, where he gave vent to a low whistle. Instantly feet were heard approaching, and through the gloom appeared the diminutive form of Tony.

"Is it you, Will? What's up? Any luck?"

"The best! I've got the documents! But we've got to slide away from here instanter. Dirk smells a rat, and will be out on us in a second more."

"Got 'em? Jolly boy! Come this way. I've got the game laid out. We'll salt the old sucker!"

Will rapidly followed his active assistant. In a few minutes they reached a spot a short distance beyond the limits of the village. Here still stood the antiquated vehicle which Tony had used in Dirk's escape.

"There you are, Will. Jump in and drive off like wild. It's Jake's team. I'll make it all right."

"Aren't you coming with me?"

"Nary time. I'm goin' to stay behind, and circumnavigate old Dirk. Drive ahead. Don't lose a minute."

"But where will I go to?"

"Anywhere, so it's out o' these diggin's. Make for a railroad depot somewhere. Snatch a train, and dig for the city. Leave the team to take keer of itself. Wilson's rich enough to pay the piper. Now shoot, like greased lightnin'!"

Will gathered the reins and shook up the lazy old creature, who had been contentedly cropping the wayside grass. He soon vanished into the night, along the country road that opened before him, but certainly not with the speed of greased lightning as Tony had recommended.

The latter returned toward the cottage, with the hope of in some way covering the retreat of his confederate. He had scarcely reached it ere Dirk came plunging furiously out. Seeing the boy, he caught him savagely by the arm, with a low and fierce exclamation.

"You young son of a screech-owl!" he hissed. "So you're larkin' round here, are you? I see through the whole trick now, blast my stupid brains! If you don't put me instanter on the track o' that devil's cub I'll grind you into a plaster, shoot me if I don't!"

Dirk, as we have said, was shrewd and quick-witted. He had been for the time deceived, and his senses befogged with fear. But the loss of his treasured documents had recalled his wits. They had not gone without hands, that he knew. Hands are usually connected with the face. The face he had seen was not that of a specter, for specters do not carry off stray valuables. He saw through the trick at a flash. The boy was not drowned after all. He had been rescued, and a trick devised with his aid.

Who had rescued him? Who but Jake Dumps! At this thought a recollection came to Dirk's mind. He now knew why the room had been familiar to him. He was in Jake's cottage. And the boy Tony? He was in the scheme. Like a flash the meaning of the rescue, and of his midnight ride, came to Dirk's brain.

"Mark Wilson again," he said, striking his forehead in anger at his stupidity. "It's a neat game, I swear! Hang if I don't show 'em that Dirk Dorgan's no baby to be played with."

It was in this spirit that he had plunged again from the house, and caught Tony lurking in its vicinity. His suspicions confirmed by this circumstance, he had broken out as we have detailed.

"What's bu'sted?" queried Tony, without a shadow of fear. "No use goin' off half-cocked, as I kin see. Guess somethin's got loose on yer insides, or you wouldn't be raisin' sich a ran-tankerous roar."

"The boy!" ejaculated Dirk, in short, thick tones. "Tell me where he is, instanter! I'll not waste many words on you!"

Tony recognized that it was a dangerous moment. Dirk was in a humor that rendered trifling perilous. Yet Tony was bound not to sell his confederate, and he sought to shield him by a little square lying.

"Don't see no use squeezin' a feller's life out," he complained. "Let go my collar, and I'll tell you."

"Tell now, or—" Dirk raised his ponderous fist.

"Well then, the boy jist shot out that there door," began Tony. "He galloped past me like a colt, and struck 'cross toward the river front. Come along, and I'll show you jest how he went."

"That way?" asked Dirk, pointing across the village, to a spot where a light revealed a small group of men.

"Jist so."

"Very well. Come ahead."

He started out, dragging Tony by the collar. The latter held back.

"Ye're not goin' the right way."

"Ain't I?" queried Dirk, grimly, as he strode on. "The right way, I s'pose, would be to guv myself up to them men, and be held fast while that young hound digs off? You're a keen little coon; but Dirk Dorgan ain't to be fooled by a sand-snipe. Come on, now, and don't make no noise, or I'll choke yer weasand. If that boy slides it's goin' to be bad fur your hide."

He was hurrying in an opposite direction from that into which Tony had sought to deceive him. They were quickly outside the village.

A few steps more, and Dirk halted. He twisted the boy around until he faced him.

"Now where's that team?" he asked, savagely. "It was hereabouts you left it. Jist point out the spot."

It was unsafe to prevaricate with a man in Dirk's present humor.

"This is the spot," answered Tony, sullenly. "Ye're standin' on it now."

"Where is the team then?"

"Can't answer no conundrums. Strayed off, I reckon."

Dirk paid no attention to this answer. He was listening. The wind had for the moment lulled, and there came to his quick ears the faint sound of a rattling carriage wheel.

"Thought so," he declared. "Ain't quite a fool yet. That's what's come o' the little rat. Bet you high I overhaul him. Come ahead."

He paused and looked around, feeling the weight in his hand very light. To his surprise he held only an empty jacket. Tony had taken advantage of the moment's inattention to slip out of his garment, and disappear into the darkness. A mocking laugh came to Dirk's ears.

"Good-by," cried Tony's voice from the shadows. "If you want to nab me, here I am. Bet I guv you a foot-race."

"Go to blazes!" exclaimed Dirk in a rage. "I know my game."

He hurried off toward the point from which had come the sound of wheels.

It was a double trail. While Dirk hurried after the fugitive in the carriage, Tony followed on foot in the rear. The wide-awake boy was bound to keep on the alert. He knew that Will would not find it easy to escape from his keen and vigorous pursuer. But two are better than one, and a friend in the rear is often a useful arrangement.

The hours of the night went on, and daylight appeared. Will was not yet overtaken. He had managed, by the aid of a flexible switch, to get his old charger into a respectable speed. With the start he had he had left Dirk considerably in the rear.

But the road was a straight one, without any branches, and the pursuer came on confidently. When daylight broke Dirk was sure of his game. There were the fresh prints of wheels in the road. He continued his pursuit, with unflagging strength. At a long distance in the rear came on Tony Thorne, just keeping Dirk within sight when some rising ground gave him a long outlook.

Will, famished by his exertions through the night, stopped shortly after daybreak at a roadside house, and purchased a frugal breakfast. He also gave his tired horse a drink, and a nip at the grass.

This morning rest lasted for half an hour, at the end of which time he put his unwilling steed again into motion. Another half-hour elapsed, and Dirk came up to Will's halting-place. The signs of a halt were unmistakable. He in his turn paused in his career, and entered the cottage. An old man sat in a corner engaged with his morning pipe, and quite ready to answer Dirk's questions.

A few words sufficed. The description which the old man gave of his preceding visitor brought a grin of satisfaction to Dirk's rough face. It was Will Worth beyond a doubt.

"Did he say where he was goin'?" asked Dirk.

"Why," drawled the old man behind his pipe, "he was cur'us 'bout railroad depots and the like. I telled 'im the nighest was at Squam, ten miles furder. Reckon he's gone there."

This was enough. Dirk's game lay clear before him now. The fugitive had the start, and a horse's legs to carry him, but there were short cuts across the country which Dirk well knew,

and he started off with confidence of nailing his game in Squam.

"And I'll have them papers out o' him then, if I have to squeeze out every drop of his blood," he savagely declared, as he left the road and took to the wayside field.

Fifteen minutes afterward the old man was disturbed at his pipe by a third visitor, a stout-built boy, who asked nearly the same questions as Dirk had put.

The querulous old chap was a little miffed at his multiplicity of visitors.

"Mought let a man ha' his mornin' pipe out, anyhow," he grumbled. "Wonder how many more on'em there are?"

But he answered Tony's questions, and gave him the hint of Squam as the ending point of this long chase.

Tony, on entering the road again, stopped for a moment's reflection. But his mind was quickly made up. Instead of continuing the pursuit he turned back. There was a new scheme in his brain.

It was late in the morning when Will at length drove into the town of Squam. It was well he had not much further to go, for his horse was about on his last legs. For the last mile or two he had come at a dragging walk, and now seemed about ready to lie down and give up the ghost.

"Take good care of that noble beast," exclaimed Will, as he sprung from the rickety gig in front of the country tavern around which were grouped the few houses of Squam. "He'll be called for. And now I want to get out of this town as quick as I got in it. When does the next train go through?"

"Which way?"
"Any way. To New York, Philadelphia, or Jericho. I don't care."

"It's half an hour to the next train."

"Very good. I'll wait. Get me a bite to eat."

Will quickly finished the plain meal set out before him.

"You needn't hurry," said the landlord. "You've got fifteen minutes yet, and it's not five minutes' walk to the station."

"Guess I'll step over. You take good care of that horse. You'll be paid for your trouble. He will be called for in a couple of days. And now good-by. I am in a hurry to get out of this part of the State."

He turned toward the door, and made a step in advance. It was followed by two steps in retreat, while Will's face grew suddenly white.

And not without reason; for there stood Dirk Dorgan, a smile of insolent triumph on his face.

"Ye're in a hurry to go, are you, my lad? Jist s'pose you make up yer mind to wait a bit. I've got a little crow to pick with you."

CHAPTER XI.

A TURN IN THE GAME.

To say that Will was startled does not half express it. He was overwhelmed, dumfounded, utterly upset with surprise at this extraordinary circumstance. Had Dirk Dorgan dropped from the skies, or shot up from the earth? No matter how, he was there, at any rate, with a grin of malicious triumph on his face, and it did not take Will long to realize that he was in a very tight box.

"Soho, my jolly young sprout," said Dirk, with a sneering laugh. "You thought you had the old bull by the horns. What do you think o' yerself, anyhow, my nimble little scapegrallows! A neat ghost you are now, aren't you?"

Will had been looking to the right and left, in a dazed fancy that some avenue of escape might open. But no chance appeared. He must face the music. At the thought he flung off the dismay that had for the moment mastered him, and regained his vanished courage.

"Get out of my way," he haughtily demanded. "How dare you obstruct my passage? Do you permit fellows like this to interfere with the movements of your guests?" he asked the landlord.

The latter had been looking confusedly from one to the other of the contestants, at a loss what to make out of the scene. Will's haughty demeanor now gave him his cue.

"No," he declared. "Who the deuce are you, and what do you mean by stopping up my door?" he demanded of Dirk. "Get away from there now, and let this young gentleman pass, before I find the means to make you."

"Old cock and young. Dunno which crows loudest," sneered Dirk. "Mebbe some on you'd like to put me outer the way. If you've got that notion, I'm agreeable."

"Threaten me, do you, fellow?" stormed the

landlord. "By cock and pie, you'll go if I say the word! What do you want here?"

There were several stout fellows in the bar-room, and Dirk thought it expedient to haul in his horns.

"Don't git riled," he soothingly remarked. "Didn't want to tech yer sore spots. It's only arter that boy I am, the rascally little thief!"

"Thief!" exclaimed Will hotly. "I defy you to prove that I've stolen anything from you."

"Thief!" repeated the landlord, with a questioning look.

"Jist so," answered Dirk. "The young hound stole some valuable papers from me, and made tracks. Lucky I overhauled him, or there'd been the Old Nick to pay. What's more he stole a horse and gig, that I s'pect is in your stables now."

"That's so," acknowledged the landlord. "So this is your game, is it, my lad? Trying to make me a receiver of stolen goods, eh?"

"He lies!" rejoined Will angrily. "The horse and gig are all right, as you will find. As for the papers—"

"Dig on," broke in Dirk. "What 'bout the papers?"

"I'll hand them over to the right owner. They'll not go out of my care till then."

"You will, hey?" cried Dirk. "Ye're a very accommodatin' young person, you are. Pile 'em over then. I've a notion they'll git in the right hands."

He stepped forward, and reached out his brawny hand for Will's collar. The lad retreated behind the landlord and his boon companions.

"I call on you for protection against this ruffian," he demanded.

At this appeal one of the men arose and confronted Dirk.

"Hold your level, my good fellow," he said. "It's an ugly charge you bring. It needs to be proved."

"I'll prove it, then. Let the little thief hand you over the papers. If he can tell you what they are, he can keep them. If he can't, and I tell you what's in every one of them, they're mine. Isn't that square?"

The men looked at each other with an air of concurrence.

"That sounds correct," said the one who had spoken. "I don't know any easier way of proving property. Hand me the papers, boy. We'll see who can best describe them."

Will had listened to this conversation, but he had been listening more intently for something else. It came at this instant, a long, shrill, far-off whistle.

He now put on an air of defiance, as he edged around toward the wall of the room.

"They are not his papers, and I deny any right of his to see them."

"That won't work, my lad," declared the man severely. "He's asking only for the square thing. Hand them over now, or we'll have to go through your pockets for the plunder."

At this moment the whistle came again, louder and nearer, an unmistakable locomotive signal.

"If I must, I must," rejoined Will, thrusting his hand into his pocket. "But it's an outrage, and I'll stick to that."

The man held out his hand, with a superior smile, for the documents. His face had a look of wisdom that would have put Solomon to shame.

He was destined to be slightly surprised. Instead of handing him the papers Will suddenly struck up his hand, and darted like a deer under his outstretched arm. Ere Dirk could make a movement to intercept him he had shot past, and gained the hotel door.

"Good-by," he cried. "You can find me in Philadelphia."

Away he went, toward the railway station, which the whistling engine was now rapidly approaching.

A look of blank astonishment passed over the faces of the inmates of the bar-room, who had been completely deceived. Then, with a fierce oath, Dirk wheeled around on his heel, and put himself in rapid pursuit.

Down the street they went, boy and man, while the men who had been left in the lurch streamed in a long line after.

Will was active and swift, and darted onward like a young deer. His pursuer lumbered after, quickly falling into the rear. It was evident that he would not be able to overtake the boy. Meanwhile the sound of the coming engine grew momentarily louder.

Unluckily Will was unacquainted with the locality of the station, and had at first taken

the wrong direction. The sound of the train set him right, but he had lost considerable distance, while Dirk, who knew the town, made directly for the station.

In consequence, when Will, out of breath, reached the platform, his stalwart enemy was not many feet behind him. The train was already in and at rest. It would make no long stop at this small village.

A puff of the whistle announced that the train was on the point of starting. Will sprung for a car. His foot was on the step, and the train in motion. He looked over his shoulder with a triumphant glance at his pursuer.

It was a risky moment. Dirk was nearer than Will had imagined. At that instant his heavy hand fell on the boy's collar, a strong jerk tore him from his hold, and the train moved on, leaving Will held at full length of Dirk's powerful arm.

"Weren't so spry as you thought, you blessed young coon," said the captor, with a grim laugh. "I've got you now, you katydid, and I'll have them papers, if I have to shake 'em out of yer skin."

"You will, eh?" cried the resolute boy. "Here, conductor; hold on to this!"

With a rapid movement Will tore the roll of papers from his breast, and sent them with a quick fling to the conductor, who stood on the platform of the rear car, then just moving past.

The surprised conductor grasped at the packet flung him, bending far over to do so. It struck his hand, but he failed to grasp it. It fell to the track behind the departing train.

Will had played his last card, and had failed. Dirk released him and sprung for the package. He was too late. The man who had taken the matter in hand in the bar-room was ahead of him.

"Just hold your horses," exclaimed this individual, as he picked up the fallen parcel. "I believe I was appointed umpire of this little game. You've got to prove property, my good sir, before you touch this package. Wasn't that the bargain?"

"Yes, yes," replied the men to whom he had appealed.

"That's my offer," rejoined Dirk. "I ain't goin' back on it."

"That looks to me about the size of the job," broke in the landlord. "But let's adjourn back to the hotel. There ain't no more trains coming and we'd best go through the thing judgmatical."

This proposition seemed a wise one, and the party made their way back to their starting-point.

Will walked with them quietly enough. He had done his best, and was defeated. There was no use struggling against fate; but he was determined not to lose sight of that interesting parcel while the ghost of a chance remained.

"It's about time we were going back," remarked the landlord, pointing ahead. "There's a carriage with a neat bay horse at the hotel door. I fancy I've been running away from guests."

They looked curiously at the horse as they passed. It was a stranger, and as wet as if it had taken a long, hard journey. But there was other matter of more interest just now, and they crowded into the bar-room, in which there was no sign of new guests.

"We'll soon settle this jig," remarked the man with the papers, as he opened the package and examined them. "There's a number and a name at the head of each paper. The owner ought to be able to give these names. Your turn, my lad. What name is on number one?"

"I don't know," answered Will sullenly.

The men exchanged significant glances.

"It is your turn now," the umpire said to Dirk. "What is number one named?"

"I'm not sure 'bout the numbers," answered Dirk, standing with a firm grip on his chair; "but you bet I kin lay down the names. It's my notion as number one is—"

"Dirk Dorgan!" came a loud voice from the rear door of the room.

"Hillo!" exclaimed the waterman, looking to see who had accosted him.

There walked into the room a tall, strongly-built man, with a very determined cast of countenance. He moved resolutely forward.

But Will had his eyes fixed on another and smaller figure that followed him. He could hardly repress a cry; it was no less a person than Tony Thorne.

Will would have rushed toward him with an exclamation, only for some very energetic signals from Tony, who drew back again into the shadow of the doorway.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Dirk, looking in surprise at the new-comer.

"Somebody you don't care to see," was the stern answer, as the man's hand fell on Dick's shoulder. "I am the constable of Clarion county, and I arrest you for the murder of Will Worth."

Dirk glared at him in surprise.

"Arrest me? Murder? Why, here's the boy now! How the blazes could he be murdered when he's here?"

The constable turned sharply to Will, whose face was strange to him.

"Who? This boy? Do you mean to declare that this is the boy whom you left last night to drown?"

"He wants to rob me," declared Will, taking the cue. "I have some important papers here which he is trying to get from me."

"You lie! you reprobate," cried Dirk. "There's a boy that knows all 'bout it," pointing to Tony. "Step up here, youngster, and tell the truth. Ain't that the boy that they say I murdered?"

Tony stepped forward, with a queer look on his face. He looked at Dirk, and then at Will, as if puzzled.

"Won't do, Dirk Dorgan," he declared, shaking his head. "You can't play no sich gum-game as that. Didn't s'pose I was goin' to lie, to help you out, did you? You got hold of the wrong coon, now you mind."

"Why, you blasted devil's cub!" roared Dirk, springing furiously at Tony.

But before he could reach the boy he was caught by the constable, who, with a quick and skillful motion, slipped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

"It's a neat game, my man, but it won't work," he sternly remarked. "You'll go back to Micmac with me, if I have to take you in pieces. And you'll have to bring up a better witness than this lad before you get clear of a charge of murder."

He laid his hand again heavily on the shoulder of the prisoner, who was utterly speechless with rage.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE LAW.

"Not proved. That's the verdict," remarked the man who had appointed himself umpire. "Here, young man, I guess this is your property." He returned Will the package of papers. "Sorry we let ourselves be taken in by this fellow."

In fact, the unexpected arrest of Dirk on a charge of murder had created an intense excitement among the tenants of the bar-room, who retreated before Dirk's glaring locks as if he had been an escaped tiger. And he would have been as bad as a tiger to deal with, had not the constable so alertly slipped the handcuffs on his wrists.

He was foaming with rage, while his little glaring eyes rested in impotent fury on the two boys.

"Why, you infernal little hell-dogs!" he roared, "have you got the cheek to stand up there and say you don't know one another, and that this young rat ain't the one I left on Pigmy Island? Hang my top-knot, if that ain't the richest job I ever heerd on! Do you want to hang me, you white-livered scapegraces?"

"Wouldn't be much loss," answered Tony shortly. "There's often been better men hung."

"I am very sorry," chimed in Will, with a sly smile. "It will be a pity if you are ever hanged. But, you know, if you choose to get up a little comedy, you can't expect everybody to play in it."

"Blast yer imperdent pictur'—" began Dirk, but he was suddenly cut short by the constable.

"Come—come," said the latter. "There has been about enough of this. It was a neat game you tried, Dirk Dorgan, but it has failed. Back to Micmac you go, and without delay."

"Ye're a blind fool, or ye'd see the boys was lyin'," declared Dirk. "I'll go, if you'll fetch them along. And hang the step I'll go without!"

Tony and Will had exchanged a few words in the mean time.

"All right; we will go," said the latter. "Mind you all, I haven't said I'm the boy or I ain't the boy that Dirk tried to murder. That's got to be settled before the magistrate. I suppose if I should say I was the boy, this gentleman wouldn't believe it."

"Not much," answered the constable shortly. "I ain't quite green enough to be sold for an onion. We'll all go back to Micmac together, and settle the business there. I will leave my

horse here, landlord. There's a train about due for Micmac; we'll take that down."

Dirk fell into a sullen silence. He was satisfied so long as Will was to go back with him. Once cleared of the charge of murder, he could force the boy to return the stolen papers.

In less than half an hour afterward, the shore-bound train came whistling in. Witbin two minutes more it was off again, with our friends on board. An hour more passed by, and it came to a halt in the station of Micmac, within hearing of the roar of the sea, and with the odor of the ocean in the air.

A curious crowd followed the party as they made their way through the streets of the seaside town, Dirk still handcuffed and under the vigilant eyes of the constable, while Will and Tony walked close behind.

A few minutes brought them to the magistrate's office, which was quickly filled by the thronging crowd.

"What is the matter?" they asked one another. "Is this the murderer? He looks like it, by Jove!"

Others were staring at Will, whom they recognized as the missing boy. It was altogether a very odd affair. The hearing proceeded in an informal manner.

The constable's story was quickly told, the prisoner identified as Dirk Dorgan, the man who was charged with the murder of the missing boy, and the magistrate began to write a commitment.

"Jis s'pose you hold yer bosses a bit," growled Dirk, now speaking for the first time. "There's sich a thng as shootin' ahead o' yer mark. I don't see how, under the laws of these United States, a man kin be hung for murderin' a boy that's still kickin' in his skin. S'pose you explain how."

"No insolence, sirrah!" roared the important magistrate. "What do you mean by this ridiculous speech?"

"I mean that the boy's here, at your elbow. Ain't got a hair rumped on his head. I'd like you to order this sharp coon to take these bracelets off my wrists. Only that I'm a quiet man I'd brained him with 'em afore now."

The puzzled magistrate rolled his eyes about the room.

"What does he mean?" he helplessly demanded. "Where is this boy?"

"Here," cried several, pushing Will forward. "The prisoner tells the truth, sir. We can testify that this is Will Worth, whom this man is accused of having murdered."

"Is that the fact?" asked the astonished official, addressing Will.

"Yes, sir," replied the latter. "He left me on Pigmy Island. I might have been drowned, but I wasn't. I was taken off in time to save Dirk Dorgan's neck."

"Then what does this ridiculous business mean?" demanded the magistrate severely of the constable. "Why have you brought this man and boy before me?"

"Because I did not know the boy, and he denied that he was Will Worth."

"Excuse me. I did nothing of the kind," averred Will.

"Then this chap did."

"Nary time," answered Tony. "We only beat 'round the bush a trifle."

"It's a fool of a business right through," cried the constable, in a rage. "I have done my duty in arresting the man under the warrant in my hands, and bringing him in. Do you discharge him, your honor?"

"Certainly. The prisoner stands discharged."

The constable quietly removed the handcuffs from Dirk's wrists.

The stalwart waterman shook himself with the energy of a Newfoundland dog, while a grin of satisfaction pervaded his broad face.

"Another time don't go so fast, and you won't have to eat dirt," he sarcastically remarked to the constable. "And now, your honor, I've got my charge to make. Don't let that boy leave the room. I charge him with stealing from me a package of valuable documents, which he has with him at this present minute."

"Aha!" exclaimed the surprised magistrate. "A charge of larceny. This is a serious matter. Secure that boy. This may as well be looked into now. Bring forward the defendant."

But Will did not wait to be secured. He walked boldly up to the magistrate's desk.

"I deny the charge," he said. "I defy him to prove it."

"Not so fast. Not so fast," cried the official, busily writing. "Not a word from any one until I am ready to question you." He continued to write. "There! Now, my man,

make your charge. What are the particulars of this alleged larceny?"

Dirk described the loss of his papers and his efforts to recover them, in somewhat confused language. The magistrate turned to Will, who stood in an easy and confident attitude, awaiting his questions.

"Don't look like a thief," muttered the official. "Well, young man, what have you to say to this charge?"

"It is a tissue of nonsense from beginning to end," answered Will. "I have stolen nothing from this man."

"You have the papers," cried Dirk. "The constable here saw them in Squam."

"You have not proved that they are yours," rejoined Will, easily. "I did have a roll of papers, your honor, which this man claims. I picked them up on the floor of a room in Jake Dumps's cottage, where some one had dropped them."

"It was I dropped 'em there, and well you know it," roared Dick.

"Silence!" severely commanded the magistrate. "This is a strange accusation. But the papers themselves should show who is their rightful owner. Pass them up to me, young man. I will take charge of them until their ownership is proved."

"I am sorry," began Will, in an easy tone; "but I am not able to do so."

"Not able? Why not?"

"Because they are no longer in my possession. I have returned them to the man in whose house I found them by the hands of his nephew, Tony Thorne."

This quiet declaration made an excitement in the office of the magistrate.

"It is a lie!" cried Dirk, harshly. "He has them about him. I demand that he be searched. And fetch up the other boy, that young imp, Tony."

But Tony was not to be found. Just when he had left the room nobody knew, but he was certainly gone. And with him had gone Dirk's treasured documents, as Will's easy demeanor proved. There was another [serious checkmate to the old rascal's game.

"You can search me," said Will, quietly. "I have no objections. But I am afraid you won't find any stray valuables on my person."

"Where's the other young rat?" cried Dirk, in a fury. "He's got my papers! Make a track, there, gentlemen. I'll have them if I have to squeeze every ounce o' blood out of his dirty carcass."

He turned and plunged through the mass of people with such vigor that they drew back in hasty alarm, as if a mad bull had charged into their midst. In a moment he was in the street, plunging furiously onward.

The others rushed out after him, curious to see the end of the race. Tony was nowhere in sight, but Dirk pushed forward in a straight line, as if he had a definite idea in his brain. His course, in fact, led directly toward the railroad depot. He was sharp enough to know that the holder of those documents was through with his business in Micmac.

He had not gone far, however, ere the sharp clang of a bell, was followed by the short, impatient puff of an engine whistle. The rumble of rolling wheels came to their ears. It was the outgoing train, bound for Philadelphia, and already beyond the reach of pursuit.

Dirk stopped in his mad flight. He grasped his hair with an angry jerk, as if he would pull it out by the roots.

"The young rat's in it," he declared. "He's too wide awake to stay in the same town with Dirk Dorgan with them papers in his pocket. Mark Wilson scores one, but he ain't won the game yet. Blast my eyes, if I don't show him that I've got another shot in my locker!"

He hastened to the river-side, flung himself into a boat and crossed over to the old town. Here he sought his cottage, and at once began to put things in order for an extended absence. The story of his acquittal had crossed the river before him, and his fellow-watermen merely stared at him, without attempting to molest him.

The next outgoing train for Philadelphia took in it two more of our characters as passengers, Will Worth and Dirk Dorgan.

CHAPTER XIII.

TONY GETS IN HIS WORK.

We must precede the flight of our characters from the town by the sea to the City of Brotherly Love, to which they were all rolling at railroad speed.

In the office of the large mercantile establish-

ment of Wilson & Brown sat the two members of the firm in company with another personage, a keen-eyed, sharp-faced individual.

They were engaged in earnest conversation, the third person of the party listening with close attention to the remarks of his companions.

"You see how the affair stands now," remarked Mr. Wilson. "I fear it was an idle scheme of mine to send the boys down there. I have received no advices from there yet, and have come to the conclusion that they will be no match for the shrewd villain with whom they have to deal. I even fear that he may do them a harm if he discovers their errand, for he is a violent character. For that reason I sent for you."

"To go down and look after the safety of the boys?"

"Yes; and try to get at Dirk Dorgan's secret."

"I see; I see. Very well, I am open for the job. But I cannot go it blind. I must know all the circumstances of the affair so that I can work intelligently. Nothing is to be picked up by groping in the dark."

"You are right," rejoined Mr. Wilson. "I don't like to open old sores, but of course you must learn the story of my life ere you can know how to act. I am of English birth, Mr. Morgan, as perhaps you may know."

"Exactly, sir. Proceed."

"I inherited a valuable estate in England, married there, and had one child, a charming little boy. You will excuse me if I make this story very short. Among the servants whom I employed was one Dirk Dorgan, a surly fellow who had been a sailor in his time, and bore a very doubtful character. I did not know his reputation until afterward, but found him a difficult customer to get along with, and had to reprimand him very severely on several occasions. Finally, for some insolence, I knocked the fellow down with a cane, and discharged him from my service."

"Nothing uncommon in that," remarked Mr. Morgan.

"He was of a violent temper, and sought to gain revenge. He assailed me, in fact, and injured me severely, for which he was arrested, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. Such is the first chapter of my story."

"Swore deadly revenge against you, I suppose?"

"So I understand. But before he was released from prison I had left England. A commercial enterprise into which I had entered obliged me to make a hasty journey to America. I had only intended my visit to be temporary. But on arriving here I found a splendid business opening, that induced me to remain. My wife had continued in England, and I employed her in disposing of my property there, ere joining me in America. In consequence of this a year elapsed before she set sail for this country, with my child, in the barque Emma, a vessel belonging to the mercantile house of which I was a partner."

"Dirk meanwhile had been released?" queried Mr. Morgan.

"Yes, and had come to this country, where he had settled as a fisherman on the coast. I have reason to believe that he still retained his project of revenge against me. He unhappily gained a splendid opportunity to carry it out. In a fearful storm, now about seventeen years ago, the barque Emma was wrecked on the New Jersey coast, and nearly every soul on board swallowed up by the merciless sea. She was lured to the coast by false lights, if we are to believe some of the watermen of the coast, who do not hesitate to blame Dirk for the work. However, that remains unproved. At all events she went to pieces, and my poor wife went to the bottom with her."

He paused in emotion. Mr. Morgan looked at him in sympathy, and asked:

"The boy? Was he saved?"

"There were only two souls came ashore alive. A sailor and my child. He was carried by the sailor, but was taken from him while he was in a swoon. He has never been seen since."

"That is very strange," remarked Mr. Morgan. "Does no one know what was done with the child, or who obtained it?"

"Not a soul knows. All we know is that Dirk Dorgan disappeared that night from the village of Micmac, and was absent for several weeks. He then returned and resumed his old life, as if nothing had happened."

"You are sure the rescued child was yours?"

"Oh yes! The sailor is still alive, and has testified to that."

"It is a strange story. You have made

efforts, you say, to discover the truth from Dirk?"

"Many. But all useless. I am satisfied that he has proofs concealed that would put me on the track of my child, if they could be obtained. I have sent the boys down on a last effort to get these proofs. It is the same mission which I wish you to undertake."

"It is a doubtful enterprise," remarked Mr. Morgan, shaking his head. "We might arrest him and search his premises, but I imagine it would be useless. Such men know well the art of concealing. As for inducing him to reveal his secret there is hardly a forlorn hope of that. Possibly some happy chance—such chances do occasionally occur. At all events nothing tried, nothing won. I will go."

"I have but slight hopes of success," answered Mr. Wilson mournfully. "Yet it is likely that the boys may have made Dirk's acquaintance by this time, and through their aid—"

He was interrupted by the opening of the door, which was flung back with as much vigor as if it had been struck by a battering-ram. The space was filled with no less a person than Tony Thorne, who stood there with sparkling eyes, and flushed face.

"Here I am!" he cried. "Right side up with care! Jolly as a rooster, and wide-awake as a June-bug! Bet you high that Tony and Will are the lads! If we ain't gone through Dirk Dorgan like a cat through a milk-pan, then there's no use talkin', that's all."

"What's the matter, boy?" Mr. Brown sprung up and grasped him by the arm. "Have you lost your senses? What ails you?"

"Guess my brain-pan's sound," answered Tony shortly.

"Then what do you mean?" asked Mr. Wilson eagerly. "Have you been successful? Have you got the—"

"There they are," exclaimed Tony, slamming the package of papers on the table with a thunderin' slap. "Fetched 'em, you bet! Will and Tony are the boys. Go through 'em instanter, for old Dirk is arter me like a nigger arter a possum. He'll spile the game if he gets his play in afore you."

Tony sunk into a chair, utterly exhausted with his haste and his excitement. The remaining members of the party were not less excited. Mr. Wilson seized the package with trembling fingers, opened it, and scattered the papers it contained loosely over the table.

He snatched up the first of these that came to his hand, and hurriedly examined it. Then, with a flushed face and gleaming eyes, he sprung up and seized Tony impulsively by the hands.

"The thanks of a father on you, my lad," he fervently exclaimed. "They are the desired proofs. They will put me on the track of my stolen son. Do not fear but I will repay you richly for this service."

"Guess I've had my pay out in fun," answered Tony indifferently. "Best pay Will. It was him snatched the dockymen. And lawsee! ain't we had a royal old time! You best believe."

"Examine them, Mr. Morgan and Mr. Brown," cried the excited father. "Dirk has been kind enough to preserve written statements of all his operations, as I had reason to think. These are in our bands now. He has furnished us the means of defeating his schemes."

The other gentlemen examined the papers carefully. After doing so Mr. Morgan looked up.

"There will be no need of going to the shore for evidence," he said. "We have it here, in black and white. But we have not the child yet. It seems by these papers that Dirk placed her in charge of a woman named Rebecca Luke, in this city. That woman must be found, and quickly, before Dirk can see her. Did you say he was following you?" he asked Tony.

"Calk'late he is. I left him in Micmac, but I bet high he's arter me on the next train. What did you say the woman's name was?" There was an odd twinkle in Tony's eye.

"Rebecca Luke," replied the detective quickly. "Do you know her?"

"No," answered Tony. "I've a notion, though, I kin git on her track afore she's much older." His face was full of the light of a shrewd idea.

"Do so, then, as quick as possible. Meanwhile I will set the machinery of the police force at work to discover her. If she is still in this city I will promise to trace her in the next five or six hours."

"And the next train from Micmac will be due in three hours," declared Tony. "That fetches Dirk. Dirk goes and puts mischief in this woman's head. The game's all up. Five or six hours won't do."

"Come with me, boy," cried Mr. Morgan. "You know Dirk. We will watch the train. Put me on his track once, and I promise to discount his little game. Come on, there are no minutes to spare now. We must strike while the iron is hot."

He hastened from the office, followed by Tony. But the latter was much the less excited of the two. There was evidently a queer idea at work in his brain, which brought a sly smile every few minutes to his lips. Tony was undoubtedly working up a little game of his own, that was warranted to discount the detective's sharpest scheme.

CHAPTER XIV.

DIRK BLOCKS THE DETECTIVE'S GAME.

In a meanly-furnished room in a tumble-down house, in a southern section of the city, sat a wrinkled and ill-favored old woman, who looked as if she had grown old rather through vice than years. She was rocking herself in a creaking old chair which threatened to go to pieces with every movement. As she rocked, she hummed to herself in a cracked voice some ditty of her youthful days.

"The ungrateful young devil!" she sourly muttered to herself. "He ran away and left me, he did. If he'd only known, he'd not been so quick. I'll pinch him yet—I'll pinch the ungrateful brat till he howls!"

She closed her thumb and finger with a spiteful movement, as if she had a morsel of living flesh between them. There was something cruel in the glare of her twinkling eyes.

Ere she could say more the door was flung quickly open, and a man hastily broke into the room. It was the stalwart form of Dirk Dorgan.

"Quick!" he cried. "I am tracked by the police. My papers are stolen; I trust to you to save the whole game!"

The woman sprung to her feet with an alert energy. She seemed to have regained her youthful vigor.

"Dirk!" she exclaimed. "You here?—and tracked? Speak—quick! What am I to do?"

"Swear you never saw the boy—you had no boy!"

"Pish! It won't do," she cried sneeringly. "There's dozens know it. And they've got the papers you was fool enough to keep. It won't do."

"You've lost sight of him, then," Dirk hastily continued. "He ran away, years ago. You don't know where in the world he is."

"That's better." She nodded approvingly, as she sunk back in her chair.

"Stick to it," cried Dirk. "You know me, Beccy. Don't dare go back on me."

Ere more could be said the door again opened and the tall, athletic form of Mr. Morgan entered.

He looked knowingly from one to the other of the two persons present.

"Dirk Dorgan," he said, "I am happy to make your acquaintance. Mrs. Luke, your most obedient. I am sorry I was not a little sooner, as I would have enjoyed the short conversation you have been having together."

"Who are you?" Dirk harshly demanded. "What do you want?"

"Suppose you let the lady of the house answer that question," replied the officer. "As for who I am you will soon know."

He turned to the door and made a sign. A policeman entered.

"Take care of this man." He pointed to Dirk. "Beware," he continued. "I have a warrant in my pocket against a certain Dirk Dorgan for child-stealing. Keep quiet if you don't want to get into mischief."

Dirk turned slightly pale at this pointed warning, yet he retained his scornful expression of countenance.

"Go ahead," he remarked. "I won't interfere."

"Then you have done the mischief I feared already," rejoined Mr. Morgan, with a threatening look at the stolid ruffian. "It is a long lane that has no turning, Dirk Dorgan, as you may find ere you are done with me."

He turned to the old woman, who had continued to rock herself during this conversation.

"Now, Mrs. Luke, I want some information from you," began the officer, in a stern tone. "You will find it to your advantage to answer me clearly and truthfully. Seventeen years

ago a child, then not more than a year old, was placed in your charge. Where is that child now?"

He bent his brows threateningly upon the old woman, as if he desired to intimidate her into making some damaging admission. But he did not know his party. Mrs. Luke put on a lugubrious expression, and broke out in a high key:

"If you'll only bring him back to his old aunty again, I'll forever bless your sweet face," she cried, in strained accents. "Do I remember the boy? It's well I remember him. I've not had a night's sleep since he ran away from me, the blessed young thafe. Oh, wirra! but it was a bitter pill for me. I loved the little lad like he'd been my own. Och! that he could ever leave his old aunty!"

"Where is he now?" asked Mr. Morgan, sternly.

"Sorra the one of me knows! It's a good ten years since I set eyes on the blessed rapscallion. And I'm always feared my dead and gone sister will rise from her grave to ax what I've done with her boy. But, indeed, I treated the ungrateful lad like he was an angel, and it's never my fault that he went to the bad."

The officer turned his shrewd eyes from Dirk's stolid face to the lugubrious countenance of the old woman.

"Your sister? What has she to do with it?"

Mrs. Luke drew the back of her hand across her eyes, as if to wipe away a tear.

"Wasn't it my own sister Maggie's son, as was married to Dirk's brother here? Ah, me, what a pretty gal she was! They are both dead years agone, the more's the pity. Dirk took the baby and brought it to me to fetch up. Ab, wirra! but I've done my duty badly."

Mr. Morgan's brows contracted as he continued to look in Mrs. Luke's whining face. He answered, sternly:

"That story won't do, my good woman. It is a tissue of lies from beginning to end. If you are wise you will tell the truth honestly. I know far more of your history than you imagine, but I will give you a chance to redeem yourself without further trouble. Make a clean breast of it, and you will be made comfortable for the remainder of your life; continue to lie, and you go to prison."

"Me lie, is it? It's lucky for you I'm a weak old woman, or I'd tear your eyes out fer the insult. Oh, mercy on me! I've lived till this day to be called a liar by a cream-faced rapscaillon like this! An old woman with gray hairs! To think of the shame of it!"

She rocked herself violently, with her hands to her eyes, from which she seemed to be seeking to force tears.

Mr. Morgan turned suddenly to Dirk, on whose face lurked a sneering smile.

"You have a neat confederate," he remarked. "She has been taught her story well. I might believe her but that I have evidence in your own handwriting to the contrary. You will go with me."

"Where?"

"Where I please. To prison if I like. Your only hope for liberty is in telling the truth."

"Go ahead," said Dirk, defiantly. "I dare you to prove anything against me."

Mr. Morgan turned to the policeman.

"You take charge of the old lady, Mr. Jones. Don't let her out of your sight. I will send an officer with a search-warrant to search her house."

"Search my house!" exclaimed Mrs. Luke, angrily. "And for what, you insulting blackguard?"

"For the baby clothes of the child that was left in your care."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST TUNE OF A VIOLIN.

It was the day succeeding that in which the events just described had taken place. In the private office of Wilson & Brown a group of persons was gathered. These consisted of the two members of the firm, of Dirk Dorgan and Mrs. Luke, of the detective, Mr. Morgan, and one or two other persons connected with the mercantile establishment.

A long conversation had taken place, but with little effect. Dirk was still stolid and obstinate. As for Mrs. Luke neither promises or threats had any effect on her. She alternated between whining and abuse, until the shrewd detective was at his wits' end how to get to the bottom of the lie which he knew she was telling.

"We have a clear case against these persons,

Mr. Wilson," he remarked. "Your recognition of the child's clothes, and trinkets, which were found in Mrs. Luke's house, to be those worn by your son, is satisfactory evidence." He pointed to a small heap of garments on the table. "The sailor who brought the child ashore has seen and recognized them. I have found plentiful evidence that this woman had the child in her keeping, and that she treated him with shameful cruelty. He was forced to go out as a beginning fiddler, and beaten cruelly if he did not bring in the amount of money she demanded. No wonder he ran away. But I will trace him yet by the fiddle."

"He stole it, the dirty young thief," declared the old woman shrewishly. "He stole it, and ran away, the little blackguard! Oh wirra, if I only had my two hands on the fiddle again, that belonged to my own dead son!"

"Is this it, Mother Luke?"

It was a youthful voice that spoke. Tony Thorne stood before the old woman, holding up a diminutive, sadly-cracked violin.

She glanced at the musical instrument with wild-staring eyes, and then snatched it eagerly from his hands, while a pulse of real emotion passed over her wrinkled face.

"It is mine! It is mine!" she ejaculated, pressing it eagerly to her bosom. "Many and many a time have I gone to sleep to its music. It is my own that I loved as much as I hated the runaway brat that stole it. Nobody shall ever take it from me again."

Here was a decided change in the programme. Every eye was fixed on the old lady, who had at last been moved to a truthful expression, and on the boy, who stood before her with a very knowing look on his shrewd young face.

Mr. Morgan quickly took the cue. He turned to Tony with a surprised countenance.

"So you were on the track all the time, you keen young rogue," he exclaimed. "Where did you get the fiddle? You know the missing boy?"

"You bet!" answered Tony.

Two men sprung forward, Dirk and Mr. Wilson, each grasping one arm of the boy.

"You young liar," hissed the first. "Look out that I don't burst your poll."

"You know my son!" cried the second. "Ob! where is he? Restore him to my arms!"

"Don't swaller me up alive," cried Tony, sourly, as he jerked loose from the two hands that held him. "It's jist as you say, Mr. Wilson. I kin lay my hands on your son. Nailed him last night, as soon I heard that Mrs. Luke was the woman as bad him."

"Where is he? Bring him to me!" cried the excited father.

"Look out for a surprise, then, for you know him better than I do. Jist look sharp for a queer old eye-opener. Come in here," he cried, with a raised voice. "You're wanted by your daddy!"

All eyes were turned to the door of the office, at his call. To their utter astonishment, there walked in the graceful form of Will Worth, with a look of modest hope on his intelligent young face.

Ere a word could be spoken, Mother Luke had sprung forward and caught the boy by the arm, while her bleared eyes ardently surveyed his face. The incident of the violin had somehow roused new thoughts and emotions in her mind, and she was a different woman from what she had been ten minutes before.

"It is he! It is he!" she cried. "The boy I brought up and who ran away from me. Ah! the ungrateful scamp, arter all I'd done fer him! But I've got my fiddle back. Nobody shall ever have it again. It is mine, mine!"

She released Will's arm, and hugged the recovered treasure to her breast, as if she, too, had found a lost child.

Mr. Wilson stood for a moment in a state of utter bewilderment.

"Will! Will Worth!" he cried. "He my lost son? Ah, he is! he is! I was always drawn to him! I always loved him! Come to my arms, my boy! My long-lost son!"

In a moment he had Will clasped in a close embrace, while tears ran profusely from his eyes, as he bent his head in an attitude of prayer over the lost that had been found, the waif of the sea, thus surprisingly returned to his arms.

We need not dwell upon this strange finale to our long tale of a boy's life. It was an extraordinary turn of circumstances that the lad whom Mr. Wilson had himself brought up into a business life, and had chosen to aid him in the search for his abducted child, should himself prove to be that child, returned to him in this surprising manner. Even Dirk's harsh face

could not repress a trace of emotion at this remarkable turn of destiny.

The reader will forgive us if we quickly dismiss our characters. We have reached the last scene of the play, and there is no need to keep the actors posturing before the curtain. It will suffice to say that Dirk was convicted of the crime of child-stealing, and sentenced to an imprisonment of ten years in the State penitentiary. As for his confederate, it could not be proved that she knew the child to be stolen, and she was necessarily acquitted.

Mr. Wilson, over whose life a cloud had so long hung, was supremely happy once more in the recovery of his lost son, and the more so that the poor boy had passed unscathed through the fire of poverty and crime, and emerged as worthy in nature as in name from the perils of a vagrant's life.

The happy father was not ungrateful. He had wealth enough to make comfortable all who had aided in the search for his lost son. The market-man who had been so kind to Will in his boyish vagrancy has been given a boost in business that has made him a man for life, and as for Jake Dumps he blesses the day in which his new-found nephew came to him. He has no longer need to fish for a living.

Tony Thorne has ceased to be a scape-grace street boy. Well educated, and broken from his old habits, he has long been a prominent salesman in the store of Wilson & Brown, where his shrewdness has enabled him to make his mark in the business world. He and Will have become the closest of friends, and are not likely soon to forget the great mill with Jimmy Jones, which first brought them together. It is very likely that they will in time succeed the older members of the firm, as parties in the wealthy commercial house of Wilson & Brown.

THE END.

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